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'...in little room confining mighty men...'

## SHAKESPEARE IN SMALL SPACES

with particular reference to ten productions  
1990 to 1995

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

*Awarded MPhil 1998.*

JOY LESLIE GIBSON

The School of Drama and Theatre Arts

MIDDLESEX UNIVERSITY

November 1997

# SYNOPSIS

## SHAKESPEARE IN SMALL SPACES WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO TEN PRODUCTIONS - 1990 TO 1995

This thesis is divided into two sections. In the first section the Elizabethan Theatre is described and the idea that this structure shaped Shakespeare's plays is examined and emphasis is put on the fact that this was an aural theatre. After the spectacular and visual approach of the Victorian theatre, William Poel considered that the texts should again be paramount, while Harley Granville Barker, realizing that we are not Elizabethans, tried to find a compromise between the starkness of the Elizabethan theatre and the greater technical ability of the modern theatre. His one-set productions were to influence the rest of the century, though Tyrone Guthrie thought that Shakespeare should be taken away from the picture-frame stage and be restored to a thrust stage. With the creation of The Other Place at Stratford, and The Young Vic Theatre as part of the (then) National Theatre, small space productions became part of main stream theatre companies. This led to an exciting dimension in the presentation of Shakespeare texts where actors had to learn new techniques and which involved audiences to a greater extent than before and which, again, led to the aural taking place of the visual.

The second section examines ten productions performed in a variety of small theatres and the plays chosen spread over the whole of the Shakespeare canon.

approx: 75,000 words.

For JULIAN MILLER... with love



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THE CHAPTER HEADINGS ARE TAKEN FROM THE CHORUS'S  
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## PREFACE

The idea for this thesis came to me in 1993 when I realized that the productions of William Shakespeare's plays which I had most admired and enjoyed were those that had been presented in small spaces. Questioning of that admiration led to an investigation of why and how small space productions had come about and the realization that they seemed to me more faithful to the original, Elizabethan text though done with our greater technical knowledge. That small scale productions are praised by critics becomes apparent when reading the Press Cuttings Books of the Royal Shakespeare Company, The Royal National Theatre and the Young Vic, and the willingness of actors and directors to take part in these productions is obvious from the actors and directors participating in them. Although small scale productions have been part of the work of main-stream companies' work for over twenty years now, there has been no comprehensive examination of the movement to find out why these productions are so respected, and why so many directors, among them Trevor Nunn, David Thacker, Adrian Noble, Katie Mitchell and Deborah Warner have done some of their most striking work in these small spaces.

Spaces, theatres, shape the plays that are written for them. Shakespeare's plays were written for a specific type of theatre and the plays show this continually.

Much research has been done, not all of it conclusive, as to the shape and dimensions of this theatre, but what concerns this thesis is how the action of the plays were affected by this shape and size. Not that productions of his plays were confined to the structures in Southwark and Blackfriars in his day, for his plays have always been taken on tour and played in a wide variety of places. Theatres, though, change and with these structural changes the perceptions of the plays also changed. With the coming of the Victorian age, with its interest in science, visual arts and mechanics, the texts were mutilated for scenic effects, so that in Henry Irving's production of *Romeo and Juliet* the last scene was divided into three. It was not until the turn of the century that William Poel and Harley Granville Barker made the language all-important again. This respect for the text was the corner-stone in Peter Hall's and John Barton's intentions for what is now the Royal Shakespeare Company, discussed in Chapter Three. The work done, and which is still done by the Company on examining the text (whichever version chosen by the director) is, it is contended, the foundation of all the work done on the plays of Shakespeare today, though the style itself has changed as new, young directors, influenced by the newest literary criticism taught in Universities, have worked with the Company and other Companies. Plays, nowadays, are rarely substantially cut so that spectacle can be included.

For theatres are not the only thing that shape productions: interpretations or concepts (to use an up-to-date word) are also influential, and each critic, and each director, brings his own thoughts as to what he thinks Shakespeare intended or would have intended had he been living today, or to make a play 'more relevant' to today's society. These interpretations, though, are mediated by the space, technical resources and the finance available. What is possible in the Main House

at Stratford, Warwickshire, or Stratford, Ontario, is not possible in The Other Place, the Swan, or the Tom Patterson Theatre. Again we come to one of the main themes of this thesis - theatres shape plays and the productions of the plays within them.

The description of what an Elizabethan theatre may have been like and what the productions may have seen owes much to the work of Andrew Gurr, Michael Hattaway and Gãmini Salgãdo (see Bibliography). William Poel's work has been well researched by Bernice Larson Webb while Harley Granville Barker's writings speak for him. Dennis Kennedy and J.L.Styan's books were invaluable, and the diaries of Peter Hall and Anthony Sher were both entertaining and instructive. I have also called on my own research when writing the biography of Sir Ian McKellen and the numerous interviews I did with actors when I was a journalist. I would have liked to have done some more in-depth interviews, but most of the directors and actors I approached refused or referred me to their written works. My collection of programmes of Shakespeare productions has proved invaluable, and, as has been said, the Press Cuttings Books of the RSC, The Royal National Theatre and the Young Vic provided much information.

When it came to the actual plays the methodology was different. All the plays chosen had been seen by me, some of them several times. From the end of 1993 I made copious notes when watching the productions, besides collecting notices and press interviews. Many programmes contain notes by the director as to his intentions (see text and Appendices) and although many programmes are planned and sent to the printers before productions solidify, care has been taken to discover if notes and production agree. The Friends of the Royal Shakespeare Company ask actors, designers, administrators



directors and musicians to talk to them and this has proved an excellent way of finding out how they work and their opinions about small scale work.

The archives of the Royal Shakespeare Company are beautifully kept in the Shakespeare Centre where I also watched videos of small scale productions. As Honorary Archivist of the Young Vic, I had access to all their information and the Library of the Theatre Museum was also a helpful place for research. Financial Directors of various companies answered questions, though they were understandably reluctant to disclose very much. When visiting Stratford I stay at Caterham House where the RSC puts up visiting directors, designers and writers and many a lively discussion has taken place at breakfast about production values. Trevor Nunn was most helpful and provided notes. For notices in newspapers I used *Theatre Record* besides those I had kept myself, while Stratford, Ontario, kindly sent me photostats.

Audience reaction was more difficult. Theatre critics were obviously a main source of opinion. I also discussed with fellow students at the Shakespeare Institute, both when I was doing an M.Phil. there and on my many subsequent visits. I also discuss productions with my very lively and opinionated U3A, Richmond Shakespeare class. But my main source of audience reaction has been observation. The producer, the late Charles Ross, said to me that he always knew when a production of his was going to be a success as the audience would always clap with its hands held high (if they were not entertained the hands would not be raised). Since Ross made this remark, I have watched audiences closely, and like a scientist gathering empirical evidence, I have noted where hands are at the end of a production and have discovered that Charles

Ross was right. An opinion poll (and I have actually done some Market Research when I worked in an advertising agency) would have been costly. I consulted Matt Trendall in the Entertainments Division of The National Opinion Poll Organisation and was told that it had never found questioning audiences after a performance satisfactory as audiences were too impatient to get home, and, to get a sufficient response (500) to a questionnaire I would have to issue between 5,000 and 10,000 forms, a task that would be too expensive (about £5,000) and the questionnaire could be structured to get the answer I required!

As this thesis deals with the effect of small scale production on text (whichever version of the text that the director decides to use), acting and the rapport between audience and actors, the study of productions and the spaces they play in, are the concepts examined - performance was paramount.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first thanks must be to Professor Leon Rubin, my Director of Studies, for his enthusiasm and help. Professor Ken Taylor, Dr Richard Andrews and Dr Richard Allen Cave have made valuable and fruitful criticisms, while Mike Paterson was encouraging throughout. Marion J. Pringle and her staff at the Shakespeare Centre were, as always, helpful and Dr Susan Brock, then Librarian of the Shakespeare Institute was, as she always is, a source of knowledge. The librarians of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea were assiduous in finding books for me, and those of the Theatre Museum efficiently found information I needed.

Matt Trendall of NOP Consumer Market Research wrote an informative and helpful letter.



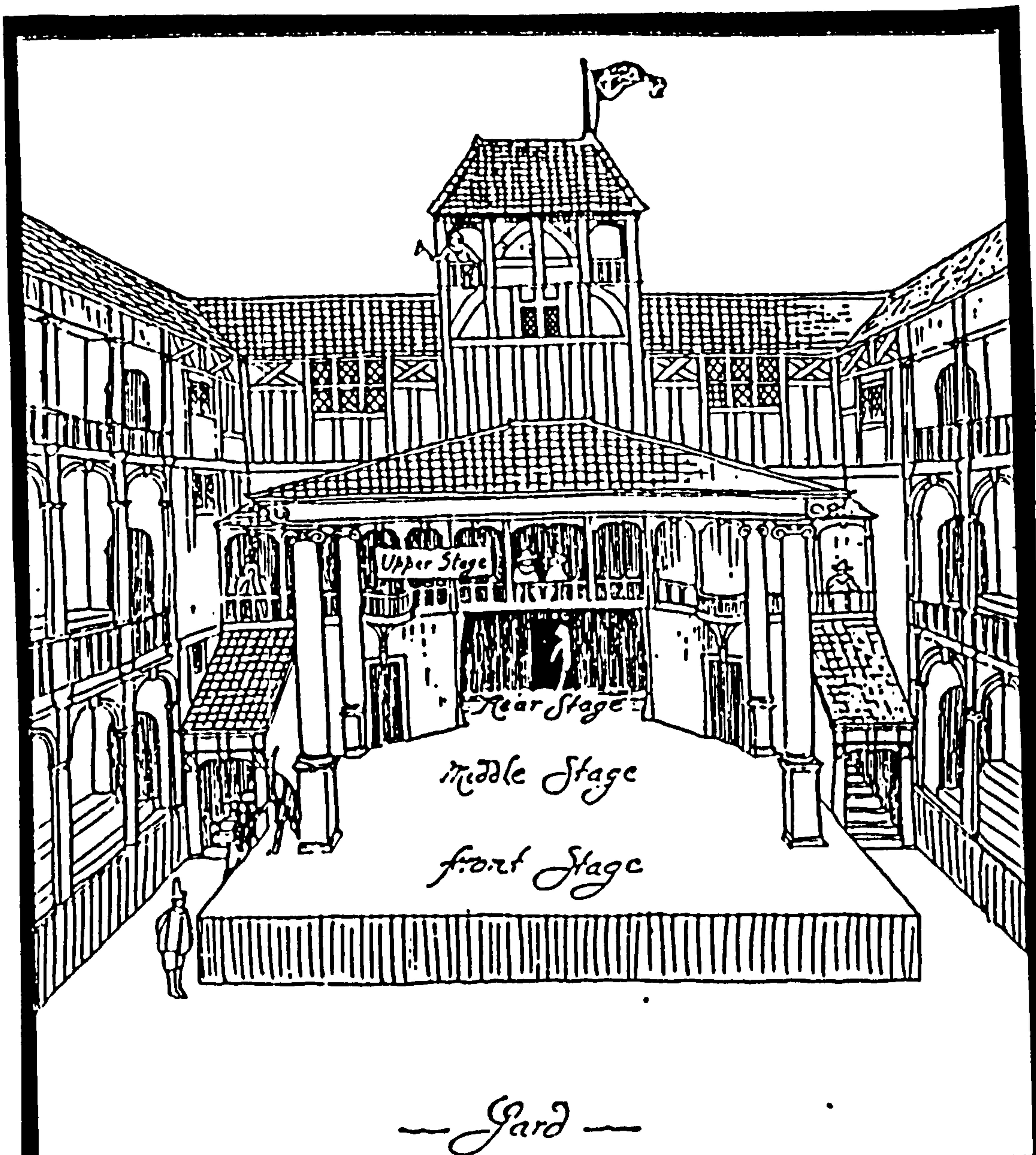
I am most grateful to the following actors and directors who answered questions and letters: Barry Foster, Griffiths Jones, Adrian Lester, Katie Mitchell, Sam Mendes, Richard Monette, John Nettles, Malcolm Ranson, Toby Stephens, David Suchet, and Rita Yerushlami. The cast of *3Henry VI* kindly answered questions about the verse-speaking session they had with John Barton. The choreographer Jonathan Burnett answered questions on movement and lighting. Tim Supple and David Thompson of the Young Vic: Kate Weber of Sadler's Wells: Stephen Browning of the Royal Shakespeare Company: Barbara Matthews of Cheek by Jowl: Sally O'Neill of the Royal National Theatre, and the playwright Peter Whelan were all informative about finance, sizes of stages, and production values. Mrs Janet Edgell, Librarian and Keeper of the Records for the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple answered questions about Middle Temple Hall. Special thanks must go to MaryLee MacNulty, PA to Trevor Nunn for her interest and help. Sean Trofin of the Stratford Festival, Ontario made my visit there both enjoyable and informative. Jean-Guy Lecat provided plans and pictures of Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord and other members of the staff there were helpful. Ann Carey drove me many miles to see productions.

Middlesex University gave me funds for my visit to Paris and paid for some theatre tickets for which I thank them.

## **SECTION ONE**

**'WHERE SPACE CHANGES, THEATRE CHANGES'**  
**TERRY HANDS**  
***THE INDEPENDENT***  
**10th July, 1991**





The 16th-century Fortune Theatre – a reconstruction from the builder's contract

from: The Royal National Theatre's Programme of  
*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, 1995

## INTRODUCTION

Space itself is infinite, but within it we create spaces. One of these spaces we call theatre. But what is a theatre? Peter Brook in his book *The Empty Space*, 1972, p 1, starts by saying that any space becomes a theatre when someone crosses it and someone watches. This explanation does not satisfy everyone. People like watching drama together, becoming part of an audience, and the first theatres of which we know anything were large amphitheatres open unto the sky. Men have delighted in building theatres of different shapes and sizes throughout history, so that today a theatre can be almost any size or shape, or just be a 'found' space in which to perform. Actors have not always used theatre buildings but have performed wherever there was a hospitable audience - in barns, inns, in the streets, in courthouses, anywhere they can. Theatre is not just a place and actors; it is audience as well. For an audience is part of the process of performance and in the best theatre it assists in the performance.

Space takes pre-eminence. Today, directors are faced with the choice of varying types of theatre in which to present their productions, most with abundant lighting and technical facilities. This thesis, though, is about small space productions and has four questions to ask and answer about them. These are :-



- 1) Why did this movement come about?
- 2) How do plays performed in small spaces differ from main house performances?
- 3) What are the unique properties of a small space production and how do directors, actors and audiences feel about them?
- 4) Is this movement just a fashionable movement that, maybe, has had its time, as other fashions in presenting Shakespeare, and is it important to keep it alive?

Within these four questions other contentions are examined. One of these is the abundance we have today is not necessary for a satisfying exploration of Shakespeare's text, which is all we have of his own intention. It is not within the scope of this thesis to argue about the accuracy of the many texts available and from which a director may choose for his production. It is further contended that a small scale production is more likely to recreate the intimacy between actors and audience we presume existed in Shakespeare's day and which members of the audience in the reconstructed Globe Theatre in the Borough are experiencing. Another aspect is whether small spaces provide a more satisfying and enjoyable experience for the actors and audiences when both feel greater contact and sharing with each other. The thesis, after examining Shakespeare's own theatre in Chapter One, then goes on, in Chapter Two, to look at productions in this century which influenced the directors working today. This starts with the work of William Poel and Harley Granville Barker, both of whom were adamant that Shakespeare's texts should be faithfully followed. Various styles of stage and design are looked at - such as thrust stages and White Box productions - which have been an attempt to produce a more 'Elizabethan' approach to the plays. The

development of the Royal Shakespeare Company, the foundation of much of the work done in Shakespeare production today, and details of the setting up of the Young Vic and The Other Place as adjuncts to the mainstream work of the two major companies is traced. Although it is contended in this thesis that it is the text which is all important, it also acknowledges that a production done exactly as it was in Shakespeare's day (even if we knew what that was) would not be acceptable to a modern audience with its high expectations of scenery, lighting and music (for we are not as Granville Barker said, 'Elizabethans'). These greater technical advantages should enhance the text not distort it. The words of the plays tell us what is necessary for us to know about place and time: we do not need scenery or lighting to do that.

The thesis, however, is not mainly concerned with large-scale Shakespeare productions but with those acted in small spaces - though comparisons are made. In Chapters Three and Four the essentials of a Shakespeare production are looked at - verse-speaking, movement, production and design values, which are constant in all Shakespeare productions, but which have to be re-thought or altered to suit small spaces. The audience/actor relationship with regard to space is another feature of these chapters. At the end of Chapter Four consideration is given to how companies cope when they perform in various types of theatre. Examples from both large and small scale productions are given.

A small space theatre is defined for the purpose of the thesis as one which has an audience of five hundred or less. The stage itself has to be small and most of the stages discussed here are around 30 feet (9 metres) square, with the exception of the thrust stages whose measurements are given in the text. This compares with



the stage of the original Globe Theatre, which, it is thought, was around 40 feet wide by 28 feet deep. The theatres, too, had to be ones which were not so well equipped technically as a main house theatre, and had to be plain and bare in themselves. The reasons for these stipulations is that it is part of the contention of the thesis that these spaces should help the audience and actors to appreciate a more direct contact with each other and focus attention on the text. This is important because the text, the only thing we know was used in the Elizabethan theatre, is more exposed in a small space. These factors lead, it is submitted, to a more Elizabethan, more Shakespearian performance, than those we get in larger theatres. Small space productions, then, are more faithful to the original conception than large-scale ones.

The second part of the thesis is an exploration of eight plays and ten productions. First the play itself is examined and the researcher's own concept is given. The productions are then described with special attention as to whether they suited the space in which they were presented. Critical notices are quoted to substantiate the researcher's own opinions. Several productions toured under various conditions and, where possible, comparisons are made. There are two productions done in the Pit by foreign countries (Georgia and Israel), and the writer visited two theatres abroad: the Tom Patterson in Canada, and the Théâtre du Bouffes du Nord where Cheek by Jowl's presentation of *As You Like It* is compared with the presentation in the Albery Theatre, London. Courtyard theatres, apron stages, theatre-in-the-round and arena productions are all included in the consideration.

The choice of plays was made from the many seen to extend over the whole canon of Shakespeare's plays from

the very early (3 *Henry VI*) to the very late (*The Winter's Tale*) and includes a history, several comedies as well as tragedies and a romance. This selection includes both the very well-known plays and one which is rarely performed (*Timon of Athens*). It includes mainstream companies, touring companies and *ad hoc* companies.

In the Conclusion the whole picture is reviewed. The reason that critics and audience alike seem to praise these productions is examined and the reason we do not have very many small scale productions is looked at. The researcher believes that this most exciting and dynamic way of presenting Shakespeare may be on the wane, though the Royal Shakespeare Company, at the moment, is committed to small scale touring. During the five years covered by this study (1990 to 1995), only two Shakespeare productions were presented in the RNT's Cottesloe - one was Anthony Sher in *Titus Andronicus*; other Deborah Warner's *Richard II* (which is mentioned several times in the text). The Young Vic initiated far fewer productions than previously (see Chapter Four). Finances play a part in these productions and are looked at briefly, though most companies were reluctant to give details. Finally, the thesis sums up the appeal and fascination of these productions and the question is addressed as to whether these are more faithful to the intentions of the author given our greater technical knowledge than those given in larger theatres.

This subject is one that has not been previously researched although the movement is more than twenty years old. The first modern small scale production came about by accident. In 1937, the Old Vic Company, led by Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh had been invited to perform *Hamlet* in the courtyard at Elsinore. Inclement weather meant that the production had to be



hastily re-organized and performed in the ballroom of an hotel. (See Chapter Two) Although this performance was acclaimed by critics, the idea was not followed up. Small theatres, like the Arts Theatre in London, did present Shakespeare but they were predominantly proscenium arch theatres. Some directors did try to move away from the arch (see Robert Chetwyn/Ian McKellen's *Henry V* at Ipswich, p 69), but it was not until the two mainstream companies starting using the Young Vic and The Other Place that small scale productions were considered very much part of the work that mainstream, or important touring and provincial companies should be doing. This work has formed a style which has influenced the way we perceive Shakespeare's plays and which, it is argued, is more 'Elizabethan' than what happens in mainhouses. This thesis is not controversial, nor does it present any theory. It is archival material about a type of production which has played an important part in Shakespearian presentation. It may be a dying convention. Although there is more touring of Shakespeare than, perhaps, ever before (at least five companies tour Shakespeare regularly) most of them tour in large proscenium arch theatres. This thesis traces the small scale production of Shakespeare's plays contending that it is an important facet of Shakespearian production.

Note: Elizabethan is used to designate the period 1590 to 1642 throughout.

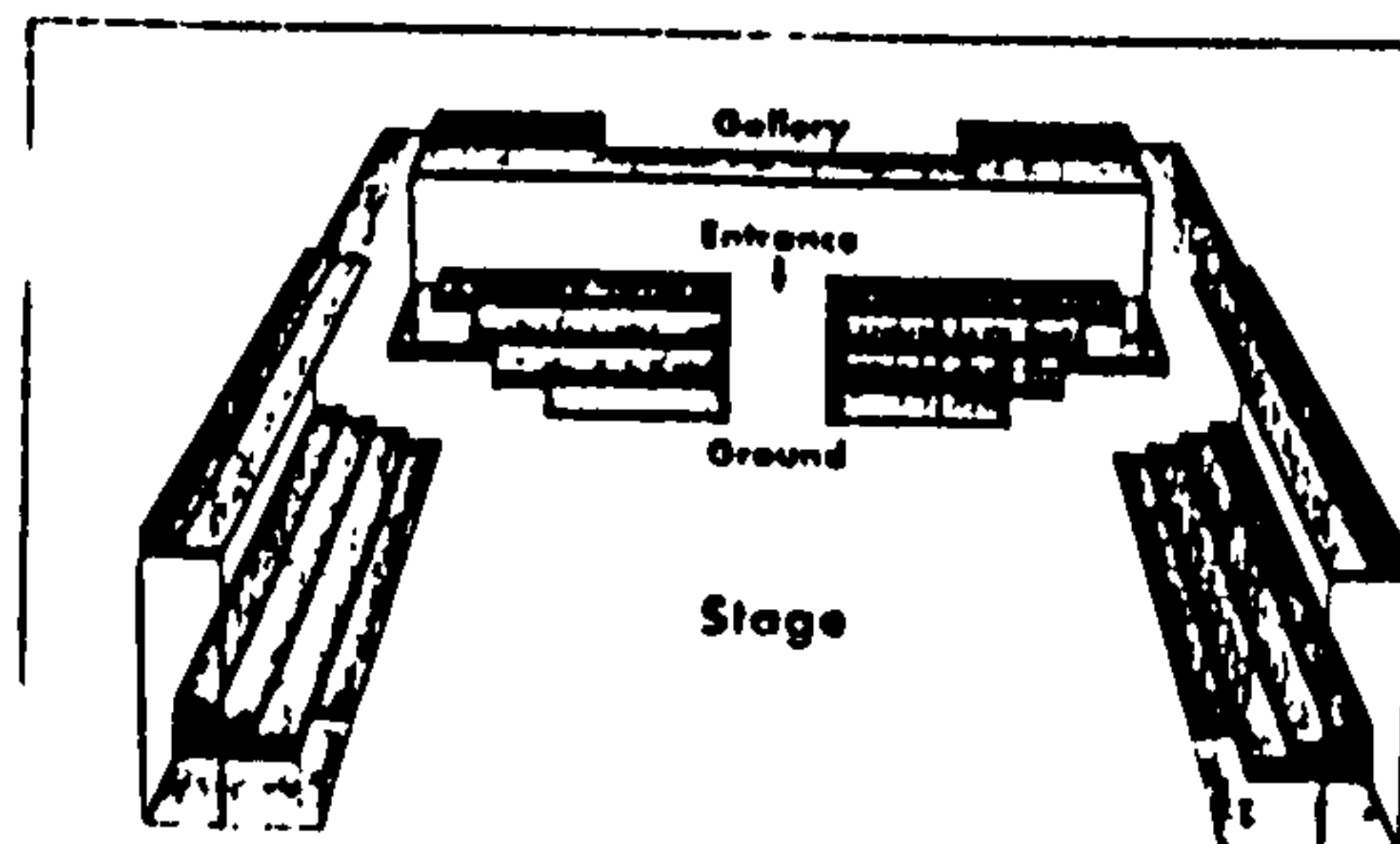
As there is no convenient way to express he and/or she, he is used throughout to cover both female and male. Likewise actor is used for both male and female actors unless actress is used to avoid 'female actor'.



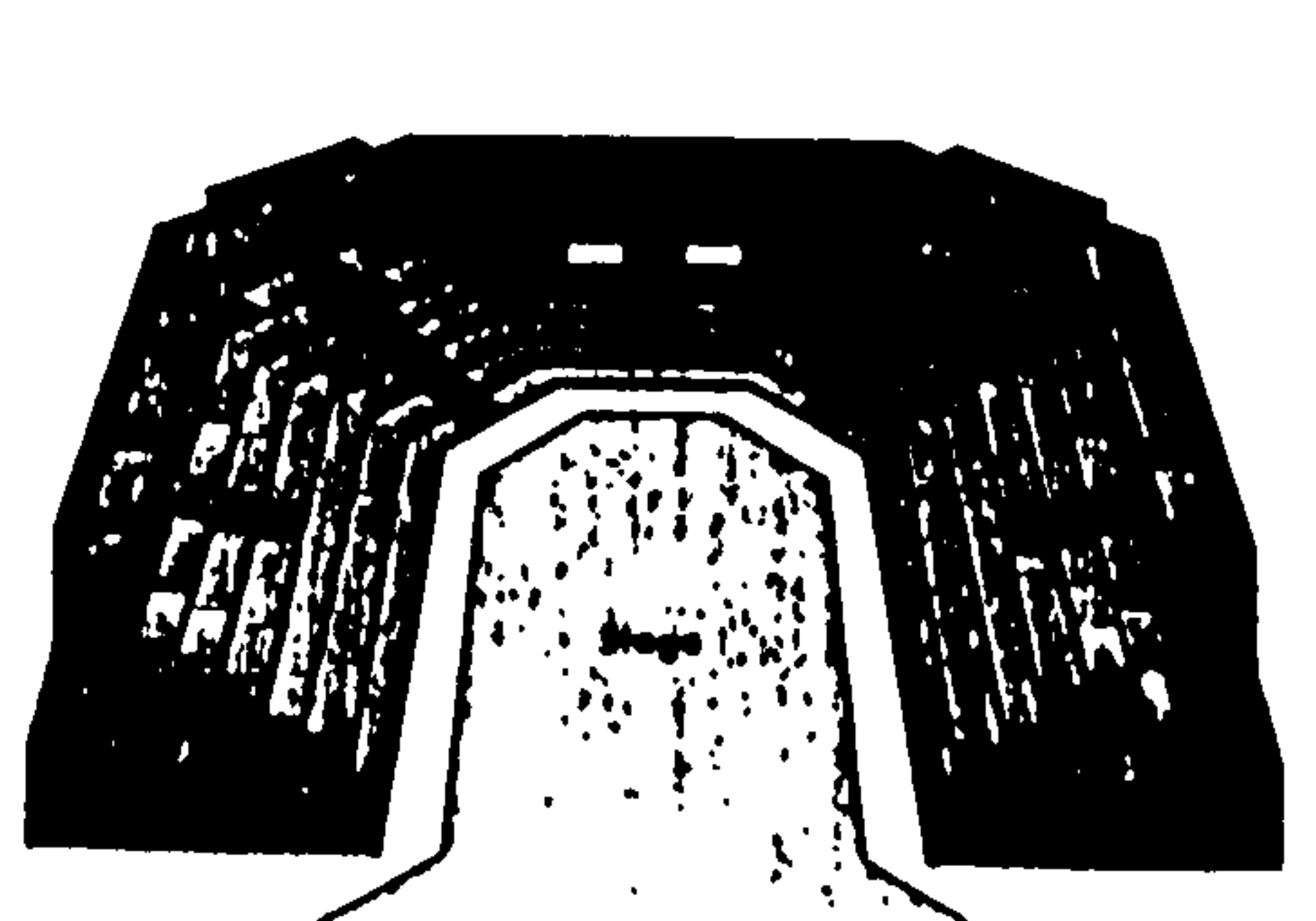
## FORMATIONS

In the text the theatres and stages are described by the following terms: Courtyard: Thrusy: in the Round and Tournament. The diagrams underneath show what each formation looks like.

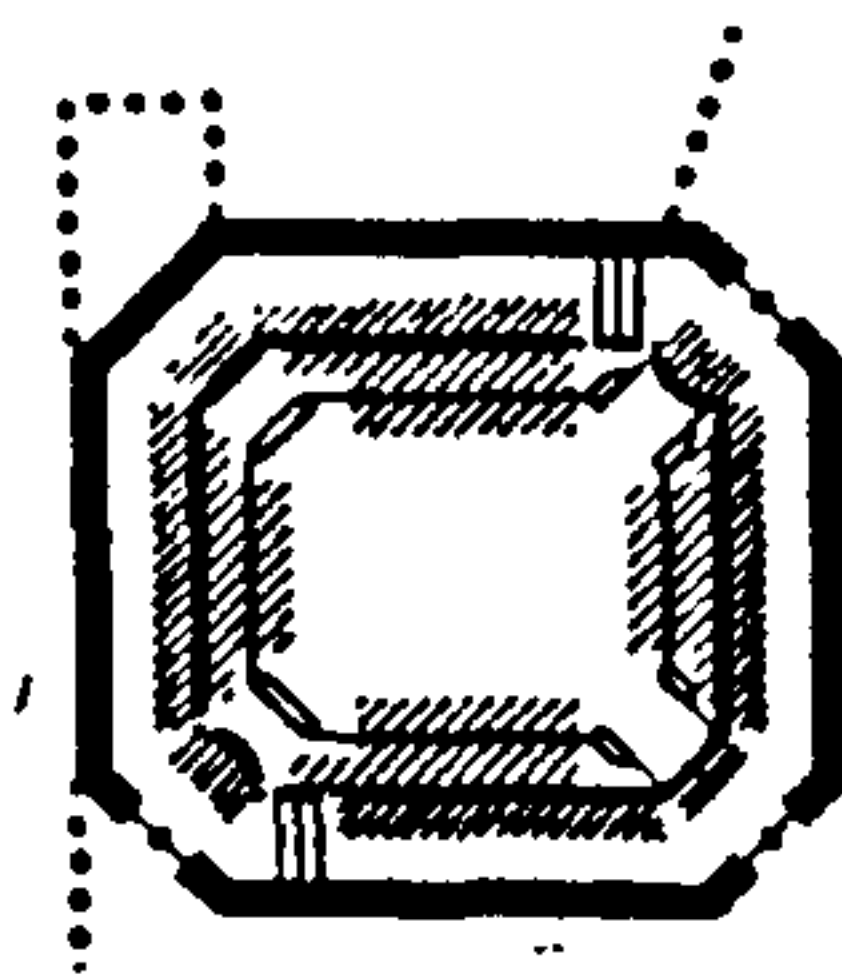
COURTYARD



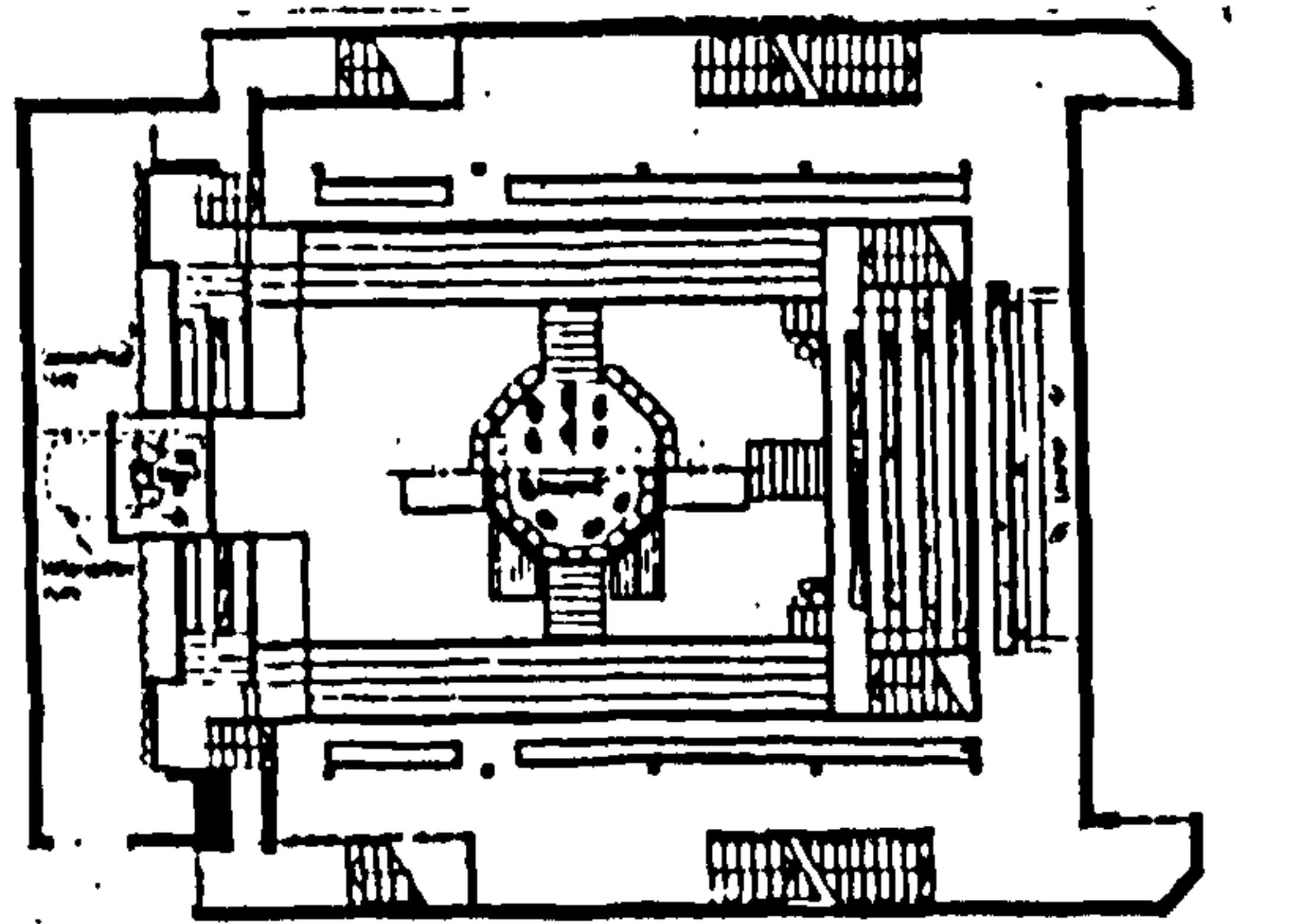
THRUST



IN THE ROUND



TOURNAMENT



Sketches taken from booking programmes and  
Mulryne and Shrewing, 1995.

## CHAPTER ONE

'...our bending author...'

To begin then at the beginning, and a consideration of what 'our bending author' Shakespeare's own theatre was like, and what its unique qualities were. Unfortunately, we have not exact specifications for the Globe nor the Blackfriars theatres, though there is evidence about other theatres in London. Stow's *Annales* lists the theatres in London in 1629

...there was builded a new faire Playhouse, neere the white Fryers. And this is the seventeenth Stage, or common Play-House, which hath bene new made within the space of three-score yeeres within London and the suburbs, viz.

Five Innes, or common Osterues turned Play-houses, one *Cockpit*, *S. Paules* singing Schoole, one in *Black-fryers*, and one in the *Whyte-fryers* which was built last of all...all the rest not named, were erected only for common Playhouses, besides the new built Beare garden, which was built as well for playes, and Fencers prizes, as Bull Bayting; besides, one on former time at *Newington Buts*; Before the space of threescore years above-sayd, I neither knew, heard, nor read, of any such Theaters, set Stages, or Play-

houses, as have been purposely built within man's memory. (Gurr, 1982, p 120)

From this quotation, it can be seen that not all the playing spaces were purpose-built theatres. The Elizabethan actor was used to playing in a variety of spaces: the Great Hall of the Inns of Courts, University Colleges and noblemen's houses; in the court-yards of hostelries (the New Inn at Gloucester is reputedly one); bull and bear-baiting pits as well, all of which were converted into a space for actors. Here they probably performed the plays that they also acted in their own theatres in London. In *Playing Places for Shakespeare* (Shakespeare Survey 47: 1994), Alan Somerset sets out touring routes travelled by companies who took to the road during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Not only did the players travel the length and breadth of England, there are records of them visiting Edinburgh, and also overseas, to Germany and Ireland, for example. *Records of Early English Drama* quoted by Somerset, have, for the last sixteen years, been examining provincial records and have built up a convincing picture of the widely flung interest in drama. But, of course, the main thrust and impetus of this activity was the theatres and dramatists in London. It was the theatre there which actually shaped the plays that were then toured, playing wherever a stage could be erected.

Shakespeare's company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, afterwards the King's Men, had two theatres, the larger Globe and the smaller, indoor Blackfriars. No measurements have been found for the Globe theatre, but a specification remains for the Fortune theatre, built in 1600 by Peyter Streete. In this he is instructed to reproduce the same type of building that he had previously built - the Globe Theatre. The contract



does specify some measurements for the Fortune and John Orrell in *The Architecture of the Fortune Playhouse* (*Shakespeare Survey* 47: 1994) opines that

In this respect the Globe was larger than the Fortune by a mere 1.8 square feet, or 0.05 per cent. A contemporary calculation, dealing in fractions rather than decimals might not have recognized any difference at all.

To return, then, to the contract for the Fortune which stated that

Thye frame of the saide howse to be sett squire and to conteine ffowerscore foot of lawfull assize every waie square withoutt and fiftie five foote of like assize square everye waie within...And the saide fframe to conteine three Stories in height, the first or lower storie to containe Nyne foote of lawfull assize in heighth, the second Storie Ekeven foote of lawful assize in heighth, and the third or upper Storie to containe Nyne foote of lawfull assize in heighth...With a Stadge and Tyreing howse to be made, erected and settup within the saide frame, with a shadowe or cover over the saide Stadge, which Stadge shall be placed & sett, as also the stearcases of the saide fframe, on such sorte as is pre-figured inthe plott therof drawen, and which Stadge shall conteine in length Fortie and Three foote of lawful assize and in breadth to extende to the middle

of the yarde of the saide howse; the same Stadge to be paled in belowe with good, strong and sufficyent new oken bourdes...And the saide Stadge to be in all other proportions contryved and fashioned like unto the Stadge of the saide Plaie howse called the Globe; With convenient windowes and lightes glazed to the saide Tyreing howse...(Gurr,1982,p 128)

This means that the playhouse was 80 feet (24 metres) square on the outside, and 55 feet (16.8 metres) on the inside. The stage itself measures 43 feet (13 metres) across and thrust into the audience by 26 feet, 6 inches (8.4 metres). The Globe was larger outside (99 feet: 30 metres) and twenty-sided according to recent interpretations of the archaeological finds. Somerset explains

Street's measurement of the Globes bays would have shown him that they were  $15\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide externally and  $11\frac{1}{2}$  feet at the front (for a diameter of 99 feet overall, a pocket calculator expresses these figures as 15.49 and 11.52 respectively). The average width of a bay would therefore have been 13 feet 6 inches. The Globe made up of twenty such bays, each 12 feet 6 inches deep and joined together as a polygon, consisted of 270 running feet of work. (Somerset 1994, pp20/1)

To give a comparison with other spaces where plays were performed, it is found that Middle Temple Hall measures



100 feet (30.4 metres) including the entrance corridor behind of the screen and under the minstrel's gallery at the east end, and 40 feet (12.8 metres) across. The Boar's Head on the city boundary, in which plays were performed, had a yard of about 38 feet (12.2 metres) by 22 feet (7 metres). The indoor theatre at Blackfriars, which James Burbage bought in 1596 was situated in the Upper Frater of what had been the monastery. It measured 110 feet (33.5 metres) by 46 feet (14 metres) and the theatre contained therein was 66 feet (20.1 metres) north to south and 46 feet (14 metres) from east to west. It is not known whether the stage occupied the eastern end or whether it extended from the longer or south wall. In any case, it must have been smaller than that at the Globe as in *The Doubtful Heir* James Shirley commented that the stage of the Globe was 'vast' compared to that at Blackfriars. The reconstituted Globe Theatre in Southwark, London, has an outer diameter of 100 feet (30 metres): an inner diameter of 75 feet (22.5 metres). The stage is 46 feet (13.8 metres) wide, 22½ feet (7 metres) deep and 5 feet (1.5 metres) high. A present day comparison as to size can be made with a double tennis court which is 80 feet (23.77 metres) by 36½ feet (10.95 metres), while a single tennis court is the same length but 30 feet (8.23 metres) wide. The Elizabethan stage was approximately half the size of a single tennis court, while the entire theatre was just over twice the width of a double tennis court but the same length.

Modern spaces which have a thrust stage differ greatly. The Festival Theatre in Stratford, Ontario has a specially designed stage and measure 30 feet (9 metres) wide by 39 feet (12 metres) deep while the studio theatre called the Tom Patterson is, in the winter, a badminton hall, and a temporary stage is put up for the Festival measuring 11 feet (3.3 metres) at the back with two angled doors at each side which are 6 feet across



(1.8 metres). At its widest the stage is 19 feet across (5.7 metres) and it is 14 feet (4.2 metres) deep. There are three steps up from the floor of the house to the stage each measuring  $1\frac{1}{2}$  feet (.480 metres).

The acting areas of the three Royal Shakespeare Company's small theatres are as follows:

The Other Place in Stratford-upon-Avon has an acting area of 32 feet (9.4 metres) by 30 feet (9 metres)

The thrust stage of the Swan, also in Stratford, measures 43 feet (13 metres) from the back wall to the front: it is 23 feet (7 metres) wide across the back and  $19\frac{1}{2}$  feet (5.8 metres) across the stage in front.

The acting area in the Pit in the Barbican, London is 30 feet (9 metres) by 23 feet (7.1 metres) when the seats are placed on three sides, and is reduced to 23 feet (7.1 metres) by 23 feet (7 metres) when the seats are placed on four sides.

Comparisons with other theatres show interesting differences: the Olivier (an open space with an apron area) measures 60 feet across while the Barbican Main House is wider at 75 feet (21.5 metres). Nottingham Playhouse is 31 feet wide (9.5 metres) and 38 feet deep (12.3 metres) while the Thorndike Theatre in Leatherhead is 38 feet wide (11 metres) and 30 feet deep (9 metres): it also has a forestage of 10 feet (3 metres). [These measurements are approximate to the nearest inch or par of metre and are taken from Gurr (1982), from figures supplied by the Middle Temple, The Royal Shakespeare Company, The Festival Theatre, Ontario, Michael Holden of the Shakespeare Globe Trust, and the other theatres

mentioned]. Touring then from The Other Place, the Pit and the Cottesloe to many of the provincial theatres presents few problems for productions as these spaces have similar acting areas, while the Swan differs both in depth and width, which would mean that actors would have to adjust their performances. If the scenery is minimal, as it often is there, then it can be easily adapted, too, but if Swan productions moved in to the Main House or the Barbican then, quite often the balcony areas in the Swan are built on the main house stage (as was done for *The Venetian Twins*) and the whole set re-designed. (RSC technical staff in conversation with writer).

The very size and shape of the Elizabethan stage, surrounded by an audience on three sides shaped the text of Shakespeare's plays, for it was possible to group players and to have them perform actions in a way that is not possible on a proscenium arch stage, or even an apron stage, which, though it juts a little way into the auditorium is still a frontal stage. For example, it was possible for actors on the Elizabethan stage to address the audience in a very intimate way: as the actors and audience are within touching distance from the actors, so the clowns could 'milk' an audience and bring them into the joke or even a piece of business. This intimacy would also have made the soliloquies more eloquent, for the actor could actually turn from one part of the audience to another seeming to bring them into his very thoughts. As John Barton says

There are few absolute rules with Shakespeare, but I personally believe that it's right ninety-nine times out of a hundred to share a soliloquy with an audience. I'm convinced it's a grave distortion to do it to oneself. If the



actor shares the speech it will work.  
 If he doesn't it'll be dissipated, and  
 the audience won't listen properly.  
 (Barton, 1984, p 94)

The Royal Shakespeare actor, Toby Stephens, added to this observation when he told the Friends of the Royal Shakespeare Company (24th June, 1995) that, while saying a soliloquy in either the Swan or The Pit, it was impossible to speak it straight out into the audience in front as he had to do in the Barbican. He was conscious that his back was all that part of the audience would see most of the time on a thrust stage unless he turned to various parts of the house as he was speaking. Another instance of where a thrust or courtyard formation makes for a different effect than what would happen in a proscenium arch theatre is in *Macbeth*, Act 1 scene iii, the Thane has an *Aside* when he both speaks his thoughts privately, and makes comments to Banquo, Ross and Angus, who are talking to each other. On a proscenium arch stage this can look contrived, but on a thrust stage the three in conversation can move more naturally up stage, still keeping in close contact with at least part of the audience while Macbeth addresses the audience nearest to him. Deborah Warner, in her production of *Richard 11* at the Cottesloe Theatre (1995), stripped it so she was able to use the whole length of the theatre's 70 feet (22 metres) arranging the seats on tiers on the longer side. This gave her cast great mobility, entrances took much longer and it was possible to show a great distance between the two rival factions. This distance worked to advantage too, when a character is introduced by characters already on stage, but who then takes three or four lines before he reaches them.

One famous instance of this is in *Hamlet* where much

discussion has taken place as to whether Hamlet overhears the plot to loose Ophelia to him (Act 2 scene ii). On an Elizabethan stage this would have posed no problem. If Gertrude, Claudius and Polonius are talking conversationally down stage right and Hamlet is up stage left then the space that separates them is nearly fifty feet on the diagonal and in no way could he actually overhear them distinctly.

At the back of the Globe stage would have been the tiring-house where the actors dressed and waited between entrances. This had a door at either side for entrances and exits. Among the stage directions that show how effectively these entrances could be used are the one from 3 *Henry VI*, Act 2 scene v

Alarum. Enter a Son that hath killed  
his Father, at one door: and a Father  
that hath killed his Son at another.

Oberon and Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Act 1 scene ii also enter by separate doors, thus emphasising their differences before even a quarrel is mentioned. There are references to the doors in the action also when, for example, Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* commands Jessica to 'Lock up my doors'. And either one or both doors were used in battle scenes to represent a city being stormed as in *Henry V* and *Coriolanus*. Whether there were doors at centre back is a matter of dispute. Certainly, there are such doors in the Middle Temple and it is believed that there was some sort of inner recess at the back of the stage. This could have been behind doors and the 1997 production of *Henry VIII* at the Swan which has such doors shows how effective they are in dramatic moments when they are flung open: or to isolate people when other characters want to



discuss something out of hearing, or to give the effect of a small room. It could be used for hiding someone (Polonius): for discovering actors (Miranda and Ferdinand playing chess). Another use would be for thrones, for Hermione's statue, for furniture, for Desdemona's bed - all of which could have been discovered in the recess and then pushed forward on a trolley. If it were curtained it would have even further uses: someone could 'die' there, the curtain pulled and the actor get up and walk away. It could also be used as another entrance, or the gates to a beleaguered city. Though Shakespeare did not actually mention an inner space, it is apparent from action that such a space was there to be used, though Gurr thinks that the inner space could have been 'a booth or scaffold built out onto the stage in front of the facade' (same source) which does seem an unnecessary complication in a theatre that was essentially non-scenic. Gurr admits that a third door could have been incorporated into the facade at the back. He writes

Twenty-one of the thirty plays known to have been performed at the Globe between 1599 and 1609 need no inner-stage or discovery space at all. Of the remaining nine, seven use the feature only once. So it was not pressed into use with great enthusiasm. It can hardly have been a really prominent feature, or if it was, then it must have been erected only for those plays needing it - a prominent feature of the stage's structure that rests unused throughout the performance would be a sore distraction to players and audience alike. (Gurr, 1982, p 137)

Distinguished scholar though he is, Professor Gurr does not appreciate in that last sentence the actuality of stage performance. A curtained recess would be no distraction at all, placed as it was some twenty-seven feet away from most of the audience, and not entirely visible to those on the sides. On a stage with little or no scenery all eyes (and all ears too, for the Elizabethans went to *hear* a play) would have been on the actors who would have been constantly moving. David Suchet, in a letter to the writer in March 1992 (see Appendix) says that on a thrust or courtyard stage 'you must make sure that you don't stay in one position for too long because at any time someone is always going to see your back'.

There was a large trap-door which could be used for apparitions (*Macbeth*): ghosts disappearing (*Hamlet*: *Julius Caesar*: *Richard III*): for Ophelia's grave. Part of the stage was covered by a thatched roof, supported by two columns. There was a playing area above about which there are different opinions as to whether this was an acting area or an area for spectators. Certainly, there are directions which say that someone enters from above, and though the de Witt drawing, copied by Arend van Buchell, does show people in this balcony, this is but a sketch which is ambiguous for it cannot be considered like a photographic record of what actually was, but should be treated as an impressionistic sketch.

De Witt also described the theatres he visited

There are four amphitheatres in London of notable beauty, which from their diverse signs bear diverse names. In each of them a different play is daily exhibited



to the populace. The two more magnificent of these are situated to the southward beyond the Thames, and from the signs suspended before them are called the Rose and the Swan...Of all the theatre, however, the largest and the most magnificent is that one of which the sign is a swan, called in the vernacular the 'Swan Theatre'; for it accommodates in its seats three thousand persons, and is built of a mass of flint stones (of which there is a prodigious supply in Britain) and supported by wooden columns painted in such excellent imitation of marble that it is able to deceive even the most cunning. Since its form resembles Roman work, I have made a sketch of it. (quoted Gurr, 1982, p 122)

That both drawing and sketch are not entirely accurate is obvious - de Witt talks of three thousand seated people, and then shows a drawing with no seats in the ground level balcony. It is highly improbable that three thousand people could be accommodated in the measurements given above. The modern Globe in Southwark reckons that fifteen hundred people seated and standing will be the most that it will hold. Although both comments and sketch are useful as a guide but cannot be regarded as a scientific, accurate specification. (For full discussion of de Witt see Gurr, 1982, pp 122/6).

The roofed structure is another interesting point. Presumably its pillars could be used to represent trees (for Orlando to pins poems on): to suspend material from them to make tents: or, as Gurr suggests 'a place

from which things could be let down from the stage' (same source, p 121) and, presumably gods and apparitions. Another use for this space would be for it to have been curtained and furniture set behind it. But this is unlikely as the curtains would shut off the action from part of the audience, those who were sitting at the sides. How wide and deep this space was is under contention, and directors using the temporary construction at the Globe in Southwark (that commended by scholars) during the experimental seasons found that it was not always helpful to the actors though most of these problems were considered and adjusted before the 1997 season started (conversation with Globe staff).

There was no scenery except that which could be carried on or off, such as bushes in tubs to indicate a garden or forest. Lin Shen in his PhD thesis *The Children of Paul's* (Shakespeare Institute) postulates the theory that small scale models of streets, or castles, could have been brought on stage to indicate an individual place, an idea similar to that Peter Hall used in his production of *All's Well That Ends Well* in the Swan (1992) when small scale models of towns were let down on the back screen. Furniture could have been brought on and actors, too, could have carried banners to indicate place, such as the French Court in *Henry V* or factions, such as the Yorkist and Lancastrian in *Henry VI* - all devices used today in small scale productions. Katie Mitchell in her production of *3 Henry VI* had large red and white roses pinned onto the arms of the protagonists to show on which side they were now on.

Costumes were in the current fashion of the day and very sumptuous for upper class characters (see Henslowe's list of costumes). Period costumes were not used, but rather indicated with helmets, togas or breastplates.



As the sumptuary laws decreed certain materials, or style of dress for different classes or professions, the Elizabethans would more recognize a character's place in society, or his profession, by his dress on stage, which would indicate the 'line' of the character.

So then, in Elizabethan times there was a bare stage with the minimum amount of scenery on it, which would have had the effect of throwing all the visual emphasis on the acting and the actor. The words and the story would have been of paramount importance and of greater prominence than in our more visual theatre. Unfortunately we have no written description of how even one performance was done. What fragments there are have been gathered by Gãmini Sãlgãdo in his book *Eyewitnesses of Shakespeare: First Hand Accounts of performances, 1590-1890*, 1975. Except for the few stage directions within the plays themselves we have no indication of the staging of many important scenes so how do we know where the action is?

The last question can be easily answered. Where it is important, Shakespeare gives us a verbal indication

What news of the Rialto? (*The Merchant of Venice*)

Berkeley Castle call you this? (*Richard 11*)

.....Are not these woods  
More free from peril than the envious court  
(*As You Like It*)

though, once the location is firmly established,

Shakespeare changes from lower stage to upper stage or to anywhere else on the thrust stage that suits him. For instance, in *Hamlet* when Hamlet and the Ghost meet and Hamlet follows him, it is still the same stage but we have moved from one part of the battlements to another place without change of scene: in the Histories we move from one part of the battlefield to another to watch different combatants, but it is still the same stage: the ballroom becomes the garden of the Capulet's house, and Romeo climbs out of Juliet's window onto the stage, but Juliet then talks to her Mother on that same stage in her bedroom from which Romeo has just climbed. It is all done by words, not by change of scenery, or, as often, nowadays, by change of lightning. And Shakespeare managed it all in daylight at the Globe or (presumably) by candlelight if at Blackfriars. Yet we always know where we are if it is necessary to the plot for us to know. The Elizabethans were made to use their imaginations far more than the average theatregoer today is made to use it.

That battle scenes were not staged as great epic set pieces is apparent from the texts. Presumably, the King's Men being a prosperous company, could have hired many extras to stage a great fight. We know that cannon were used to create noise as the original Globe was set fire to by a cannon during a performance of *Henry VIII*. Looking at the scripts, however, there are no staged battles such as the Victorians performed, nor as, today, we have in such productions as the Royal Shakespeare Company's 1995 staging of *Henry V*. Shakespeare, himself, concentrates on separate scenes which show some characteristic of his protagonists and how they react to the conditions in which they find themselves, or on hand-to-hand fighting. Battles, therefore, become duels, and exciting they must have been as the Elizabethan audience would have been knowledgeable about fighting. As Martin Holmes says



Elizabethan audiences knew a good deal about fights, and were qualified to be critical. Quite apart from periodical 'musters' and periods of brief but intensive military training that took place at Mile End and elsewhere, there was the traditional sword-and-buckler play with which the London Apprentices exercised themselves of a summer evening, before a festival...and for those who could gain official or unofficial admittance to fashionable functions there was the tilt-yard...

Arms, armour, and the use of them were not only familiar to the eye, they formed subjects, in daily life as in the French camp scene in *Henry V*, for frequent and controversial conversation. (Holmes, 1972, p 132)

So the players of Shakespeare's Company had to have a high standard of fighting hand-to-hand and this is what happens in the plays. This can be exciting and effective, particularly in a small space, where the audience is near the protagonists. Directors can also solve the problem of battle scenes in a different way. In Katie Mitchell's *3 Henry VI*, for example, there were no actual fights or battles, and in *Macbeth* played by Committed Artists, with a cast of twelve (New York International Festival, 1992: Bridge Lane Theatre, Battersea, 1993) also had no battle. In the last scenes Macbeth entered with Lady Macbeth's body in his arms which he laid at the edge of the acting area, parallel with the front row of seats. He sat there with his robes pulled around him, getting, it seemed,

smaller and smaller. Macduff and Malcolm entered up stage behind the canvas backcloth which was then lit from behind to make it transparent. They spoke the lines from each side of the stage and then Macduff came from behind the backcloth, approached Macbeth from behind: they spoke the dialogue quietly, and then Macduff stabbed Macbeth. This very effective scene relied entirely on the text and the intense acting. It was, for a battle scene, surprisingly still and quiet, but, nonetheless, very sinister and purposeful. It showed that there was no need to have a lot of 'sound and fury' the words could do it all.

The words, of course, did more. In a theatre which had little in the way of scenery and no lighting, such as we have today, Shakespeare had to paint place and atmosphere by words. As has been said previously, he also lets audiences know where the scene takes place if it is important for them to know. But sometimes Shakespeare goes further than this if, for instance, he wants to turn the actual daylight of an afternoon into the darkness of night. An elaborate occurrence of this is the scene between Jessica and Lorenzo in Act V of *The Merchant of Venice*. Another example of Shakespeare's 'lighting effects' is when Horatio describes the coming of dawn in *Hamlet* and a frightening night in the forest is skilfully painted in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The audience supplies the imagination, but Shakespeare conjures it up.

An examination of the texts (according to Gurr) finds that more than half the plays have some reference to scenes above, or at a window. Jessica, for example, throws down the casket of jewels to Lorenzo in *The Merchant of Venice*. Although there is no balcony mentioned in *Romeo and Juliet* it is obvious that Juliet is speaking above. Richard II appears on an upper



tower of Berkeley Castle, while Richard III appears with his book of devotions up aloft when the citizens are compelled to proclaim him king. Characters appear 'on the walls' as in *Henry V*. Shakespeare also specifies five times that the players ascend, and no less than thirteen times does he refer to them descending from the top part to the stage proper.

Shakespeare, if we are to believe that he was speaking in *propria persona* in *Hamlet*, wanted a natural form of acting where thought and action combined in harmony. Acting styles change from age to age and we have no possibility (there being practically no accounts of actual performances) of finding out exactly how lines were said or how characters were portrayed by the members of Shakespeare's own company. The whole question of how to speak verse will be considered later, but, Shakespeare did make it easy for his actors to get the sense of speeches as the accents fall on the important words. The actor should breathe or pause at the end of the lines and at the caesura, roughly at the half-way point. How many lines an actor can or wishes to say on one breath is a matter of how much breath he can sustain, but there are the opportunities for him to breathe at these two points. It is interesting, also, to note that the boy players need only speak two-and-a-half lines before they need to breathe, while in the men's speeches five lines seem to be the norm. (see Leslie Gibson, (M.Phil. Thesis, 1994) Shakespeare also helps with characterization as a careful study of the verse will show that each main character seems to have his own dynamic. That is, within the de-dum, de-dum of the blank verse the character is defined by vocabulary and pace. Shakespeare seems to do this by his use of mono-syllables (as both John Barton and Peter Hall point out, the majority of the speeches are mono-syllabic) but some characters, at some points, use polysyllabic words and so slow down the action. King Lear, in the



Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!  
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout  
Till you have drenched our steeples; drowned the  
  cocks!

In this speech Shakespeare not only creates the thunder storm by the actors' words, but also characterizes the part by his use of words. Contrast this speech with Hamlet's soliloquy

How all occasions do inform against me,  
And spur my dull revenge. What is a man,  
If his chief good and market of his time  
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more,  
Sure He that made us with such large discourse,  
Looking before and after, gave us not  
The capability and godlike reason  
To fust in us unused. (Act 4 scene iv)

Michael Pennington says that Shakespeare helps the actor

to control the emotion

...to discipline it mentally and technically. The means is the language through which, and only through which, that emotion can be fed. That is the essential eye of the needle. It coincides in a very peculiar way with the character's need to understand and rationalise his emotions. So that...the borderline between the actor of Hamlet and the character of Hamlet begins to coincide, and a truly theatrical metaphor is set up. (Barton, 1984, p 147)

Pennington thinks, as do other actors, that he has to 'work through the language', that it is that language which informs the emotion, not the other way around. It is the gift of marrying emotion and language that Shakespeare gave to his own players and also to any other actor who will listen to that language.

The few accounts of theatrical performances written in Shakespeare's own time describe the plot rather than the performances, though Jacques Petit says of a performance of *Titus Andronicus* on New Year's day, 1596 at the home of Lord Harrington that 'the staging was better than the subject' (Sãlgãdo: p 17), but does not say what the staging was. There is also a description by Henry Jackson of a visit of the King's Men to Oxford in 1610 in which the company acted to full houses and enormous applause (Sãlgãdo, 1975, p 30) and there are verses playing tribute to Richard Burbage. The first is about his playing of Richard III:

.....Why he could tell  
 The inch where Richmond stood, where Richard fell:  
 Besides what of his knowledge he could say  
 He had authentic notice from the play;  
 Which I might guess, by's must'r'ring up the ghosts  
 And policies, not incident to hosts;  
 But chiefly by that one perspicuous thing  
 Where he mistook a player for a king.  
 For when he would have said, King Richard dies,  
 And call'd - A horse! A horse!- he Burbage cried.  
 (*Iter Boreale c 1618*. Poems of Richard Corbet.  
 Edited by Octavius Gilchrist, 1807: quoted  
 Sãlgãdo,1975,p 38)

The other verse is the Funeral Elegy which praises his  
 ability to assume many characters:

He's gone and with him what a world are dead!  
 Which he reviv'd, to be revived so.  
 No more young Hamlet, old Hieronymo  
 Kind Lear, the grieved Moor , and more beside,  
 That liv'd in him; have now for ever died.  
 Oft have I seen him leap into the grave  
 Smiting the person which he seem'd to have  
 Of a sad lover with so true an eye  
 That there would I have sworn, he meant to die;  
 Oft have I seen him play this part in jest,  
 So lively, that spectators, and the rest  
 Of his sad crew, whilst he but seem'd to bleed  
 Amazed, though even when he died indeed.

(Sãlgãdo,1975,p 38)



That the Players were popular at Court is shown by the number of times that they performed for James 1, recorded in the Office Book of Sir Henry Herbert, Master of the Revels from 1623 to 1642. Though these records are after Shakespeare's own death, they show the continuing popularity of his plays (cf Sãlgãdo: pp 39/42).

To sum up then: the Elizabethan theatre had a bare stage jutting out into a surrounding audience with three balconies above enfolding it. On the platform there are gorgeously dressed actors moving so that their backs are not always being seen by the same part of the audience, who are always facing another part of it, but including everyone at some time or another. They are speaking swiftly, in the main, verse which conveys complex thought and emotion, but, because of its structure, the beat falls on the most important words, but which, nonetheless, needs attentive listening. There is nothing to distract the eye from them as there is no, or very little, decoration on the stage, and there is no lighting. All then is concentrated on the words and the story which the actors are telling. The actors and the audience occupy the same space and the same light. The actors are within touching distance of the audience, even the audience seated in the balconies are not far away, and see the production as if they were sitting in a balcony of a house overlooking the street. The conditions make for an intimacy and a sharing of an experience that is unique and is akin to sharing an experience with friends. It is a place, above all, where the words and the story are paramount, a place where the audience is asked to use its imagination, and to help the actors by assisting in the performance. It is one that is going to fade as more and more technology in the way of lighting and scenery becomes more available, so that the all important text gets mutilated and cut drastically to accommodate spectacular battle

scenes and processions. The very simplicity of the stage was its greatest asset, for the playwrights of the day wrote to enhance the bareness of the stage by the magic of their words. Their writing was graphic, and described, not only place, time and mood in words which continue still to make scenery and lighting largely irrelevant. That we always know where we are, and where the scene takes place, and what time of day it is, is a skill shown by the dramatists, and which, even today, really needs little embellishment.

Past ages made the theatre a technical place, which modern productions, especially in Main House, tend to do also, for there the audience has to have something visual to focus upon. The mechanics of the theatre, it is submitted, though enjoyable and have been used in many successful productions of Shakespeare are not really needed, and often distort the text of Shakespeare's plays. It is in small space productions that simplicity has returned and audience again are asked to use their imaginations and to participate fully in the play.

## CHAPTER TWO

'...ciphers to this great accompt...'

Every age has moulded its ideas of Shakespeare's text to the theatres in which the plays were performed: shape alters the production values. The plays have been re-written, re-edited, re-designed to fit the prevailing mores and theatrical conventions of the day. The increasing technical ability of the theatres, too, has had its impact on what happened on the stage. As the theatre retreated behind the proscenium arch the theatre became more scenic, so that in Victorian and Edwardian times the painted picture and the effects became more important than the text. Henry Irving's *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, had eighteen scene changes, three of them in the last scene! It was not until William Poel started his movement, at the end of the last century, to present Shakespeare as he thought it would have been done in Shakespeare's own lifetime, that a greater fidelity to the text and the spirit of the plays became a reality. Poel, according to Bernice Larson Webb, would have liked to

...obtain a permanent structure built to his specifications. It would be small. It would be not crippled by a proscenium arch. It would provide optimum interaction between players and audience. It would, in short, be an authentic



Elizabethan playhouse, providing the proper physical and emotional setting for Elizabethan drama. (Webb,1978,p 7)

Poel thought that the bare stage, thrust into the audience allowed the actors

... to step out of the picture frame and become *part of the audience*. (my itals)  
(Poel's *Monthly letter*, London, 1929:  
quoted Webb,1979,p 42)

Harley Granville Barker was another director/critic who thought that Shakespeare's text should be all important and that there should be more interaction between audience and actor. He eschewed antiquarianism though, for he used all the resources available in his theatre in the way of costume and lighting, but he played in one set, using curtains to indicate a change of scene. He thought that in rehearsal, the actors had to search for what he called 'homogeneity' in the text and that

We shall not save our souls by being Elizabethan. It is an easy way out, and strictly followed, an honourable one. But there's a difference. To be Elizabethan one must be, strictly, logically, or quite ineffectively so. And even then, it is asking much of an audience to come to the theatre so historically sensed as that. (Letter to *Play Pictorial* xxi, no: 124, 1912, p iv: quoted Styan,1977,p 82)

This is a point of view echoed by Matthew Warchus, one of the currently acclaimed Shakespearean directors. In an interview in the *Independent* 13th January, 1997, he said

The difficulty with Shakespeare is that the more you research it [the more] you discover...how different its meaning would have been [then]. And although it's a kind of privilege to make those discoveries it's terribly frustrating - because the next stage is realising that you can't convey that original meaning now.

Harley Granville Barker thought that Shakespeare's plays should be presented in one set with a small apron stage with naturalistic lighting. He achieved that by hanging torpedo lights from the dress circle, a system of lighting used in most theatres today. For the three plays which he presented at the Savoy Theatre - *The Winter's Tale* and *Twelfth Night* in 1912 and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1914 - Barker had the first three rows of the stalls taken out and an apron stage built out from the proscenium arch. As with the Barbican theatre today, and other apron stage theatres this still does not mean that the audience envelopes the stage as it does in a courtyard or thrust stage space. The photographs of Barker's productions look almost exactly as they would have in a proscenium arch theatre. At the front of the stage the players would have been nearer the audience but, from the photographs it looks as if they were acting frontally and not with the 'in the round' effect that a small space can uniquely give.

Barker re-designed the stage so that the lowest level



was that nearest the audience, while three steps led to the stage itself and a further three steps , at the back led to another level. This was permanent, but curtains were drawn across to denote different locations and bushes in tubs and furniture were moved on and off, again to denote different scenes. This set a fashion for Shakespeare in one permanent set which is often used today. In the in between the wars period this type of production was very fashionable and one typical production was *Romeo and Juliet* (1935) with John Gielgud and Laurence Olivier alternating in the rôles of Romeo and Mercutio. The set was designed by Motley, a group of three women working under that name. It was a skillful set with a tower that could become part of the street and Juliet's balcony or, even, her bedroom. It could be masked with curtains for indoor scenes and there were, as well, arches which could be moved in and out. Alan Dent, theatre critic of the *Manchester Guardian*, described it thus (19th October, 1935):

The play was already a masterpiece of compression: it has been compressed further without cutting, but with the use of an ingenious double stage, which is successful once one has accepted the convention whereby the same cubicle is Capulet's loggia, a tavern, a friar's cell, a chemist's shop, and Tybalt's grave...The setting is discreetly adaptable to the play's swift progress so that there are no waits and but one interval.

Dent's comment on the swiftness of the action and the fact that there was only one interval seems to suggest that this was very unusual at the time. Audiences were still expecting elaborate changes of scenery and



two intervals. The two interval convention lasted well into the fifties though. James Agate, speaking of John Gielgud in *Hamlet* (*Ego* 7, 18th October, 1944) commented that 'the *middle* act gave me ninety minutes of high excitement and assured virtuosity' (my italics). In the same year the Michael Benthall/Robert Helpmann *Hamlet* at the New Theatre, February 1944 was also played in three acts, breaking after the Player's entrance scene, and again after the encounter with Fortinbras. This division of a Shakespeare play into three parts, it is submitted, can completely destroy the rhythm of the play.

By the mid 1940s though, some critics were beginning to tire of the one set convention. Kenneth Tynan wrote of the production of *Romeo and Juliet* at the King's, Hammersmith, in 1946

The Travelling Repertory Company decided to be vividly *comme il faut* in their staging of the play. There was an all too permanent set, with an unmangeable staircase at its top left-hand corner, an Inner Recess, and a spacious balcony: a set, in fact, which showed its spiritual as well as physical proximity to the architecture of Hammersmith Tube Station. The present over-powering vogue for permanent sets in Shakespeare must shortly wane: they are unconvincing both as reconstructions of Elizabethan conditions and as efforts of realism, and fall flatly between the two stools: which, by the way, seems to be the absolute maximum of furniture that modern producers permit themselves. (Tynan, 1950, pp 62/63)

Granville Barker's idea of an apron stage which would make the actors more accessible to the audience had not become popular as productions were still played in proscenium arch theatres. Even the small Arts Theatre, in Newport Street, London, or the even smaller Chancery Theatre in South Kensington, were conventional theatres and though the experience of watching plays in these tiny venues did have a greater intimacy as the actors were viewed as normal size rather than remote figures, there was still, at least to the researcher, the feeling of watching an event, rather than assisting in an actuality.

There was one exception, however, which showed the advantage of having the actors on the same level and the same size as the audience. In 1937, the Old Vic Company, led by Laurence Olivier, was to play *Hamlet* in the courtyard of the castle at Elsinore. Due to vile weather conditions, the production had to be hurriedly transferred to the Ballroom. Everyone who saw this performance remarked how much more thrilling and exciting it was when done so immediately and intimately. George Bishop of the *Daily Telegraph* wrote

In an odd sort of way this improvisation suited Laurence Olivier. The simplicity of the setting, the almost charade-like character of the performance, the strain and tension of the quick preparation, the uncertainty of what was going to happen next...the distinguished and expectant audience... all these things put this wiry and virile actor on his mettle.  
(quoted Cottrell, 1977, p 132)



What was being witnessed was not a small space production but a production which had been carefully rehearsed for a proscenium arch theatre which had suddenly been forced into a different type of space, where the audience sat around the acting area. They were not just voyeurs, *but had become a part of the action - like courtiers watching the events at court.* Bishop's criticism detailed some of the elements, which it can be argued, are essentials of a small scale production - the speed, the unexpectedness and the uncertainty of where the audience's attention will be sought. The real point, though, is that the action was not separate or distanced from the audience, but took place within its space and was on the same human scale as it was. The critic Ivor Brown, who was present at the ballroom performance and also at a subsequent performance in the courtyard where the production was originally supposed to have been performed, wrote that

*Hamlet* in a ballroom had been strange and different and perhaps more truly Elizabethan (Mackintosh, 1993, p 54)

Guthrie himself wrote

The impromptu and rather haphazard performance in the hotel ballroom strengthened me in the conviction, which had been growing with each production at the Vic, that for Shakespeare the proscenium stage is unsatisfactory...At its best moments that performance in the ballroom related the audience to a Shakespeare play in a different, and, I



thought, more logical, satisfactory and effective way than can ever be achieved in a theatre of what is still regarded as orthodox design. (Guthrie, 1961, p 172)

So the foremost director of the day felt that the picture-frame stage, as he also called the proscenium stage, was antithetical to the way a Shakespeare play should be experienced by an audience. In *A Life in the Theatre*, his autobiography, he gives a full account of some of the experiments he made to get a more authentically 'Elizabethan' production. He was greatly influenced by his experience of working in the Assembly Hall in Edinburgh at the Festival in 1947 when he directed *Ane Satire of the Three Estaites* the 1540 play by Sir David Lindsay. Guthrie found, on reading the text, that

Scene after scene seemed absolutely unplayable on a proscenium arch stage, almost meaningless in terms of 'dramatic illusion'; but seemed at the same time to offer fascinating possibilities, if they could be set and acted in a manner which I felt rather than apprehended. (Guthrie, 1961, p 275)

Guthrie used this production to 'put into practice some of the theories' (same source) which he had been pondering on for several years and was, as he writes, the first sketch for the sort of Elizabethan stage that 'he had long hoped, somehow and somewhere, to establish' (same source). Although the play was an undoubted success the idea of a specially built theatre with a thrust stage never materialized as Guthrie had hoped,



THE FESTIVAL THEATRE, STRATFORD-upon-AVON, ONTARIO

Thrust Stage: 9 metres by 9 metres



by courtesy of the Festival Theatre



and it was not until he received an invitation from Tom Patterson, who was instrumental in setting up the Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontario, Canada, that Guthrie was able to build a theatre to test his theory about the advantage of a thrust stage. An approximation of an Elizabethan stage was built there, in 1953, at first in a tent, and then in a permanent theatre. Designed in collaboration with Tanya Moiseiwitch the thrust stage had a wooden structure at the back with doors and an upper stage (see illustration). The audience, though seated in a curve, does not surround the stage and is a little distance from it. The theatre seats 2,262 people. This design, though, did radically change ideas about the shape of theatres and stages and was copied, notable examples being the Festival Theatre in Chichester (built 1962) which holds 1,394 people, and the Crucible Theatre in Sheffield which holds 1,022. In the Crucible the audience can look across the stage to see other members of the audience, while in Chichester this is only possible if one is sitting in the first few rows at the extreme sides, the greater part of the audience being seated frontally, and the actors, in the main acting out towards them.

The National Theatre's Olivier Theatre was also influenced by the thrust stage design as well as by Ancient Greek theatre design, but, in spite of the fact that the Company had worked in Chichester, it was decided that this should be an open stage with a small apron. Even when this is extended, as in Terry Hands's production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1995) it still does not reach into the audience seated in semi-circle tiers and in a gallery. There is no special intimacy between audience and actors, nor any visual contact between audience members. Indeed, Laurence Olivier gave as an instruction to his committee of advisers that



...while it [the Olivier Theatre] was to have an open stage and no proscenium arch, under no circumstances were spectators to look across the acting area and see the audience opposite. In this way the fundamental quality of open stages was abandoned, that of audiences being constantly reminded of themselves, as Guthrie had noted at Elsinore (with, ironically, Olivier) in 1936[sic] and at Edinburgh in 1948. In its place the notion of a stage in the corner of a room was embraced with too great a volume for too few spectators and a stage too wide and too often lacking in focus unless either filled with expensive scenery or emptied for one or two actors positioned dead centre. (Mackintosh, 1993, p88)

The Olivier now (1997) is to try out the experiment of staging productions in the round and

'it will be achieved by constructing a large bank of seats ...at the rear and sides of the stage...This style of staging brings the opportunity to redefine the relationship between performers and audience in a large space - making a more intimate connection between them' (publicity handout, 1997).

The Royal Shakespeare Company's Main Theatre now also has an apron stage, as does the Barbican, but neither theatre allows members of the audience to look across it

to see other members nor are they deep enough to allow real contact with the audience. They are also high off the ground level of the auditorium, so that if actors do use it to speak to the audience they have to look down on it.

In 1960 the twenty-eight year old Peter Hall, together with the Cambridge don, John Barton, and the innovative Peter Brook, started a new régime at Stratford, assisted by the French director, Michel Saint-Dennis. This meant that Shakespeare was being produced by men with university backgrounds for whom critical examination of the text was important and texts were given scholarly study in the rehearsal room. A high standard of theatrical excitement was generated in Stratford as never before. Stratford became a place, not just for tourists, but a theatre where productions were both popular (in the sense that they <sup>1</sup>highly enjoyable) but which, also, took account of current criticism. The three directors knew and believed that Shakespeare was not just for his own time but had relevance for our own day, and that the texts were, as Harley Granville Barker had said, the only thing that we knew about what Shakespeare wanted. The Royal Shakespeare Company (as it became) was to evolve a way of playing and a way of speaking verse which, arguably, remains the touchstone for the performance of Shakespeare's plays even today. Peter Hall writes about the setting up of the company

I then came to the crucial part of my plan. I believed intensely that the kind of classical company I wanted to form must not only be highly trained in Shakespeare and the speaking of his verse but also in modern drama - open to the present as well as the past. Only thus could we develop the kind of protean



actors, alive to the issues of the day, that Shakespeare deserved and would give his plays contemporary life. (Hall, 1993, p 146)

As Hall proudly proclaims, these were new ideas at the time. In practice this meant a break with the past and its declamatory style of speaking, and the forming of what became 'the RSC style'.

Peter Brook also contributed to this style. He had been directly affected by Jan Kott, the Polish intellectual, to whose highly controversial book *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (published in this country in 1965) contained a preface by Brook in which he described his earlier meeting with Kott, in Warsaw. This meeting had led to Brook's realization that the Warsaw in which they were talking was one in which writers lived in danger. They had first-hand experience of political unrest and state interference, and that society there, Brook thought, was akin to society in Elizabethan times. As he writes [

It is a disquieting thought that the major part of the commentaries on Shakespeare's passions and his politics are hatched far from life by sheltered figures behind ivy-covered walls.

In contrast, Kott is an Elizabethan. Like Shakespeare, like Shakespeare's contemporaries, the world of the flesh and the world of the spirit are indivisible: they co-exist painfully in the same frame: the poet has a foot in the mud, an eye on the stars and a dagger in his hand. The contradictions of any



living process cannot be denied: there is an omnipresent paradox that cannot be argued, but must be lived: poetry is a rough magic that fuses opposites.  
(Kott, 1988, p x)

It was not only in Poland that exciting thoughts on literature were being pursued. A detailed account of the structuralist movement in France is not within the scope of this thesis (which can be found in *From Prague to Paris* by J.G. Merquior, London 1986). For the purpose of this argument, it is sufficient to say that philosophers, including J.P. Sartre and Roland Barthes, were examining the influence that a reader has on a text, promulgating the idea that everyone deconstructs a text while reading (directing) it and that the reader's ideas are more important than the writer's. Although this theory can, and often does, lead to absurdity in that the text can be so deconstructed that the original aim of the writer is lost (as in Barthes's *S/Z*), nonetheless, the basic principle is valid - my Hamlet is not your Hamlet: nor is it Peter Hall's nor Peter Brook's: nor Laurence Olivier's nor Ralph Fiennes's. That is one of the reasons that Shakespeare can be, and is, re-written for every age. So that with the newly established Company at Stratford, Shakespeare was linked to modern day issues, themes that were also being explored in the modern plays which were also being done by the Company.

A new style of acting was formed in which verse-speaking was newly minted by the scholarly John Barton, work which still goes on today (Barton coached the actors of *3 Henry VI* discussed later). He has an uncanny knack both of being to inspire actors to speak verse so that it is verse while extracting both a meaning correct for the play and also realizing the modern equivalent.

(Conversation with actors at rehearsal of *3 Henry VI*). Scholarship and theatre are closely linked here .

Hall, Brook and Barton did not eschew modern dramatic presentation or fashion. As Hall declared

Shakespeare today needs a style and tradition more than any other dramatist performed today. (quoted Styan, 1977, p 208)

In essence the style strove for directness: directness of presentation, directness in speaking the verse where sense and rhythm went hand in hand, and directness in acting. A directness that had at its heart a respect for complex texts, where acting was also direct and immediate, and which was conscious of *performing* for an audience. The first productions of the régime were brilliant spectacles that dazzled both ear and eye. The first seminal production was *Troilus and Cressida* (1960), which Hall says 'planted seeds for the future ' (Hall, 1993, p. 157). The cyclorama was lit for fierce sunlight, or darkened for the night scenes: on the stage was a sand pit. Hall explains

Leslie Hurry [the designer] and I reached it by chance. We had a hexagonal-shaped arena as the floor of our model setting, and I kept asking him to make it look more and more like sand. I wanted it to be yellow - a colour his palette for the play did not readily encompass. Finally, he rolled his grey eyes to heaven and said 'Why don't you just have real sand?'. To, I think his surprise, I



jumped at the suggestion. (Hall,1993,p 157)

A production which was adjudged as one of the most brilliant of this era was Peter Brook's production of *King Lear* (1962) with Paul Scofield in the name part giving what was considered a definitive performance. Brook's first thoughts for this play was to present it in a harsh but beautiful Renaissance world, and designs were well on the way when, according to Hall

...Brook suddenly arrived in my office with a new model that was austere, spare, and hung with sheets of rusted iron. This was the set he used , and during the storm scene the huge iron sheets vibrated to make the thunder. The play became all the more powerful because it was not illustrated literally. (Hall,1993,p 198)

Another manifestation of Peter Hall's blueprint was *The Wars of the Roses* a three play production forged from *Henry VI, parts 1,2,3* together with *Richard III* (1963). The materials used for scenery and costume were metal and leather and rough wools. The stage was heavily raked. There were two huge iron-clad doors, and the walls could slide and pivot so that the court scenes could be played in a tight, enclosed set. As the walls shifted, trees could be revealed at the back for the country scenes. These walls could also turn to reveal, for the French scenes, to reveal a copper facing. Heavy furniture was brought on and off what was basically the same set to represent all the different places where the action took place. The design (John Bury) enabled the text to be spoken swiftly and for one scene to merge into another. In spite of



its cleverness, the audience was never too aware of watching brilliant scenery (as must have been the case in Irving's day) but were conscious of seeing superb acting which carried the action along, telling a thrilling story.

The scenery and costumes in these representative productions ~~was~~ used metonymically. The semiology was both apt and obvious without being intrusive. A balance was held between beautifully spoken text and visual aptness. One served the other. The acting was exciting and based on an intelligent and scholarly reading of the text. It was both innovative, in that the productions served the text, and also conventional, in that it did not force the text into any 'concept' which was considered more important than the actual words. Nonetheless, having said that, it must be said that these productions were but an elaborate form of the between wars one set productions, which were presented to an audience without really involving them in the action. Down on a stage, not in the midst of the audience, the actors were viewed as actors, not as people with whom the surrounding people (the audience) were in contact. With the constantly moving scenery of *The Wars of the Roses* the productions were as far away from the Elizabethan theatre as they could be. But simplification was not far away.

In THE THEATRE OF CRUELTY seasons, starting in 1964, at the London Academy of Dramatic Art's small theatre, Sally Jacobs had used a box-like construction inside the edges of the stage and behind the proscenium, with a catwalk round the top and ladders for the cast to climb up or down. It was brightly, almost clinically lit. Jacobs's concept made for an antiseptic and totally objective view of what was happening on the stage. Christopher Morley and Trevor Nunn picked up on this,

and Nunn's production of *The Winter's Tale* (1969) was presented in a white box for the court scenes (with mainly white costumes) and used strobe lighting to underline Leontes's moods. Brilliantly acted by a cast, led by Judi Dench, doubling as both Hermione and Perdita, the scenery acted as an alienating force, which made the audience re-examine the play as if under a microscope, rather than feel that they were participating in it. In 1970 Peter Brook directed what has become the most famous example of White Box Productions, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Talking to Ralph Berry in 1977, he was to say

...my view has changed, evolved, through a growing awareness that the overall unifying image was much less than the play itself. And eventually, as I worked more and more outside proscenium arch theatre and in forms of theatres where the overall image proved to be less and less necessary and important, it became clear that a play of Shakespeare, and therefore a production of Shakespeare, could go far beyond the unity that one man's imagination could give, beyond that of the director and designer. (quoted in Brook, 1993, p77/8)

Sally Jacobs took Harley Granville Barker's dictum that all that is needed for Shakespeare is a great white box (Kennedy, 1993, p 184) and designed a set that was very similar to that which she had used in *THE THEATRE OF CRUELTY* season. There was no forest, the trees were represented by great spiral springs which thrust themselves menacingly at the actors: Titania's bower descended from the flies and was made of huge, red ostrich feathers. Oberon and Puck flew in on trapezes.



PETER BROOK'S WHITE BOX PRODUCTION OF  
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, 1970



from: Kennedy, 1993.



The actors, when not on the actual stage, went up to the catwalk, which went round the scenery, and watched the action. The costumes, in bright silks, were simple. The acting, also, was simple and direct, but with an energy and force that was electric. At the end, the cast acknowledged the audience, came from the stage and went round the auditorium shaking hands. Dennis Kennedy describes this as 'an all encompassing moment, uniting the play, the performers, the spectators (Kennedy: p 184). It is significant that Kennedy says 'spectators' for this is exactly what the audience had been - spectators at a clever, very clever, realization of the play, which constantly surprised it with tricks and fancies. To this member of the audience at least, it was brilliant, but alienating, like a small child saying 'Look at me'. The text was beautifully and clearly spoken as one would expect from a team of Royal Shakespeare Company actors led by Alan Howard as Theseus/Oberon and Sara Kestelman (later Gemma Jones) as Hippolyta/Titania.

The White Box productions were certainly effective, but they were too stylised to actually draw the audience into the play. Watching them, the audience was always aware that the actors were on a stage, in a picture-frame, there to be observed. In spite of the simplification, which could be justified as a modern interpretation of the bare Elizabethan stage, it was too stylized. Certainly, one had to listen to the text intently to know where one was in place and time, but the overall effect was a performance that was deeply alienating. The actors had no intimate reaction with the audience who were treated as spectators. The white (or sometimes coloured) box set still crops up in the Main House (or in small spaces when a touring company plays in such a space). Century Theatre's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* used a coloured variant of it, as did Adrian Noble's 1994/5 production. Nicholas Hynter's



1990 production of *King Lear* with John Wood also used a variant (this time the box was at an angle and tilted). It was, and is, a great influence on the design of Shakespeare's plays, and its simplification does show how little in the way of scenery is needed to get a clear picture of what is happening in the play. It is also the type of set that is easy to tour and to set up almost anywhere which has the right dimensions. But its clinical appearance is decidedly alienating and, eventually, boring.

So, to sum up, at the beginning of the 1970s, the prevalent Shakespeare was being performed in a proscenium arch or small aproned stage theatre, or in a cavernous thrust stage theatre (Chichester and Stratford, Ontario). The separateness between audience and actors was being maintained. The intimacy that Guthrie had established in the ballroom in Denmark and the Assembly Hall, Edinburgh had not been taken up. He wrote of that space

One of the pleasing effects of the performance [at the Assembly Hall] was the physical relation of the audience to the stage. The audience did not look at the actors against a background of pictorial and illusionary scenery. Seated around three sides of a stage, they focused on the actors. All the time, but unemphatically and by inference, each member of the audience was being ceaselessly reminded that he was not lost in an illusion...[he]...was *taking part, 'assisting' as the French properly express it, in a performance, a participant in a ritual.* (my italics) (Guthrie, 1961, p 279)

It was some years though before Guthrie's words were taken note of by main companies. The reasons for including a small space theatre in which the National Theatre could present productions was outlined by Kenneth Tynan, the Literary Manager from 1963 to 1973. Tynan felt that

There should be room in this great theatrical sanctuary for acorns as well as oaks. Here new play-wrights, new directors, new techniques of presentation will be given a chance to prove their worth, testing themselves in a laboratory atmosphere instead of being plunged into the full glare of the two larger auditoria. The National Theatre is not only the custodian of past tradition and present practice: it has a responsibility to the future. Like any other developing organization, it needs a research department; and this essential service, at very low cost, is what the experimental studio would supply. (Mulryne and Shewring, 1995, p 166)

But before these ideas of Tynan's could be incorporated into the building planned for the South Bank, the National Theatre was housed at the Old Vic Theatre where there was no space for such an experiment. However, the company acquired an old butcher's shop a few hundred yards along The Cut, and built what was meant to be a temporary experimental theatre on the space alongside, using the shop as a foyer. According to Frank Dunlop

When I became Administrator of the National it was agreed that I could build



a young people's theatre:unconventional, classless, open and welcoming to the theatre's lost generation. We had only £60,000 to build a temporary structure...*We asked for a cross between the Elizabethan Fortune Theatre, Guthrie's Assembly Hall, and a circus.* (my italics) (Mulryne and Shrewing, 1995,p 172)

The ideas of the intellectual Tynan and the more practical Duncan did not exactly coincide, but both express what was felt to be part of the duties of the new National Theatre. The Young Vic did, and still does, give a varied programme of old and new, and still attracts a young audience. It has produced some very distinguished Shakespeare productions, particularly in the Duncan eras, and, on occasion has been used by the Royal Shakespeare Company to transfer productions from The Other Place (*Macbeth: Othello: Measure for Measure*) or to initiate a production (*The Tempest*), which transferred to the Swan.

In any case, interest in small scale productions had increased since the war. Fringe theatre, as it was called, was contributing interesting and vital work to the theatre and small spaces such as the Bush, in London: many venues in churches, church halls and, even, rooms over garages were used at the Edinburgh Festival to present, not only new writing, but classical drama. In 1962, Peter Hall had worked at the Arts Theatre, Newport Street, London, which holds 350 people, and he retained a base here for experimental work when he became Director of the Royal Shakespeare Company to use for , mainly, new writing. In addition, he asked Michel Saint-Denis to found a RSC's Actors Studio which was to enable actors, directors, technical staff to work

with designers and writers on a small scale in Stratford. These master classes led to productions which were not open to the public but paved the way to what was to come. Another experiment by the company was the work they did under the name Theatregoround. This was a group of actors who toured round schools, colleges, factories and community centres giving recitals of scenes and verse based on a theme - *The Hollow Crown*, about the Kings and Queens of England being the most famous - and one-act plays. Eventually two Elizabethan plays were presented, *Volpone* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

TGR at first only used junior members of the company, but the work became increasingly disruptive of the work in the Main House, so Trevor Nunn, now Director, decided to incorporate TGR's work with the main work, presenting *King John* and *Doctor Faustus* in 1970 and the Ian Richardson/Richard Pasco *Richard 11*, all originally small scale productions in the Main House. At the end of 1970 the Company also presented plays at the Roundhouse in London. Previously a building used for mending locomotives, this was a found space rather than a conventional theatre, where the seats could be arranged in the round, or in courtyard formation. Along with *King John* and *Faustus*, the Company presented *Arden of Faversham* with Dorothy Tutin and, as well, *Hamlet*, *Richard 111*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, were given without scenery and in modern, almost rehearsal dress. The avowed intent of this season according to the programme was to '*encourage a creative and close actor/audience relationship*'. Instrumental and active in this work was the young, woman director Buzz Goodbody.

Goodbody had been hired by John Barton as his 'dogsbody' but soon, as her talent was recognised, she was asked by



Terry Hands to assist him in the work he was doing with TGR and in 1969 she was made Assistant Director for the whole Stratford season. Trevor Nunn, impressed by her work asked her to direct *King John* for TGR. It was the success of this tour which led to the Round House season, which was followed by a season at The Place, Euston Road, London, in the Autumn of 1971. Trevor Nunn then decided that the work done by TGR should be expanded and he asked Goodbody to be artistic director of what was really no more than a shed along the river from the Main House. This was dubbed The Other Place. According to Colin Chambers in *Other Places*

[Goodbody] knew that she could not say what she wanted on the big stage, with actors using big-stage techniques. She was resorting to spectacle, to rhetoric, to pastiche [there] and that was not the answer: it only obscured and confirmed the mystique of the proscenium relationship between actor and audience. (Chambers, 1980, p 33)

Goodbody, herself, wrote a manifesto which declared the aims of small scale theatre. She considered that studio performance gave less experienced actors a chance to get more prominent parts and also gave assistant directors opportunities. New plays could be performed which might not be considered suitable for larger spaces. The work itself could be more experimental and reach out to a larger, less conventional audience, thus serving the community. Her aims were very similar to those of Tynan and Dunlop - experiment on new and classic plays, and a new, young audience. She wrote

The RSC is financed by the whole society. We know why we play to an audience largely drawn from the upper and middle classes. We have to broaden that audience for artistic as well as social reasons...unless we make that attempt - classical theatre will become like Glyndebourne. (Chambers, 1980, p 34)

As her assistant, Goodbody had Jean Moore, a post Moore held with distinction for many years and who is accredited with keeping Goodbody's ethos alive, for, unfortunately, in April 1975, Goodbody was found dead. Her experiment at The Other Place was maturing into a success. As she had written in a memo

In a year [1974] when the RSC has done worse than usual in the big theatre in Stratford, The Other Place has done as follows: 1) *Lear* - sold out. 2) *I was Shakespeare's Double* - sold out bar 1 performance. 3) *Babies Grow Old* - average 40 per cent of the house. 4) *The Tempest* - on state of present bookings - sold out. 5) *The World Upside Down* - requested by three times as many schools as we can perform to...The Other Place is obviously needed and not just by us. My firm conviction is that policy must be continued. (Chambers, 1980, pp 40/1)

[Like the Young Vic the seats at TOP were very cheap - 40p generally, sometimes rising to 60p or even, on occasion, 70p.]



Following Goodbody's death, the whole small space movement in Stratford might have collapsed, except for Trevor Nunn, who realized that the third space was vital to the work of the RSC and a space where problems in Shakespeare's plays that seemed unresolvable on the main stage could be examined and solved. He took over Goodbody's production of *Hamlet* and then directed his own production of *Macbeth*. In it he used senior actors of the company, led by Judi Dench and Ian McKellen. It was a production, it could be claimed, that made small space work seem very much a part of main stream theatre, and a work that was rewarding both for actors and audience.

The budget for the play was £250 (*The Times*, 9th October 1976). There was a minimal set, just a circle of crates. Up stage right was a simple table where the props were placed. On the back wall were two large upright rectangles of wood with a slit between them where actors could exit and enter. Macbeth went there to murder Duncan and it was used when he was pursued by Macduff in the final scene. From there, too, Macduff returned after killing Macbeth. A large thunder sheet hung up stage right, partly obscuring the table. An effective piece of business was the 'twirl' (a movement Nunn also used again in his production of *Timon of Athens*, see under). When Macbeth and Banquo entered from the back, the witches were already huddled downstage within the lighted circle: the two soldiers looked back the way they had come, then, suddenly aware of the witches's presence, they turned sharply. Judi Dench, after reading Macbeth's letter also twirled round suddenly to face the Messenger. Dench also used the same movement before the incantation. It occurred several times, also, during the battle scenes, Macbeth discovering Macduff in this way. It was an effect which was startling in a small space, but, on a main house stage, because of the distance, became a much smaller and less

dramatic movement.

The men wore uniforms taken from the Wardrobe, while Lady Macbeth had a simple black shift dress, her head bound with a black scarf. Lady Macduff wore the same style dress and scarf, but in white. The witches wore a rag bag of clothes. The actors sat on the beer crates, which were in semi-darkness, when they were not needed, and, in effect made up the first row of the audience (see Illustration). As Gerald Jacobs wrote

...[the audience were] collaborators in the dark intense atmosphere.

As the production developed, the circle seemed to tighten the emotional pitch and closeness of the performances.  
(Jacobs, 1985, p 89)

So emotional and full of evil it seemed to one member of the audience, a priest, that he used to turn up regularly to hold up a crucifix to guard the cast (interview by writer with Ian McKellen, 1979). The simplicity of the production and the nearness of the audience gained critical appreciation. Irving Wardle wrote (*The Times*, 11th September, 1976)

What is the justification for main stage decor and mechanics when infinitely more powerful effects...can be achieved with rehearsal lights and a few orange boxes?

Robert Cushman (*Observer*, 12th September, 1976) called the production 'throat-seizing' and the other critics,



(with the exception of Bernard Levin, then Dramatic Critic of *The Sunday Times* who, a year later saw the production in the Donmar Warehouse and pronounced it 'hideous and empty') applauded the production for its dramatic integrity and its focus on the text. The production went to the Young Vic, where, as Bob Peck (Macduff) told the writer, (in an interview, 1985), that he thought the company gave its best performances. Because the production had aroused such interest, and had received such acclaim, and there was an outcry because so many of the public had been unable to get tickets, it was decided to transfer *Macbeth* to the Main House at Stratford. These performances (again according to Peck) were a complete disaster. The unique quality of that production, which depended on intimate details and intimacy with the audience, where audience and actors seemed to be one entity, was lost when the performance had to be broadened to reach the back of the theatre and the actors were on what is in effect a proscenium arch stage. Trevor Nunn wrote

We also realised that a production that had originated in The Other Place was very unlikely to be able to transfer to a larger space and retain its integrity. All the physical reasons for the work being staged in a certain way would disappear...[It] was a horrifying experience which became an object lesson. It was clear that such a transfer must never be repeated. I did transfer [*Macbeth*] with catastrophic results - bewilderment on the part of the general public who'd been led to believe that they were going to be very excited by it, and distress on the part of the Company who could no longer communicate to the people who were much further away.

Clearly then we couldn't take Other Place productions and scale them up. (Mulryne and Shewring, 1995, p 2)

As Peter Hall thought

The subtlety I saw in this *Macbeth* ...was only possible because of the scale..it was an evening that made me proud of my profession again, and full of admiration for Trevor. (Hall, 1983, p 315)

This remarkable production made small space Shakespeare respectable: that is, star actors, following the lead of Judi Dench and Ian McKellen, were now happy to play at The Other Place and first class directors were willing to direct there. Contracts for Stratford now included parts in plays to be produced there and actors such as Peter McEnery, Harriet Walter, Michael Gambon, Helen Mirren, and Jenny Agutter have all taken leading rôles at The Other Place, while middle range actors have been able to play a variety of parts which they would not have, perhaps, been offered. The excellent work that Frank Dunlop and his successors had done at the Young Vic had, in the main, been done with little-known members of the profession. Though many of the plays had been successful and praised by the critics, the Young Vic had always been considered 'fringe' and experimental. Now, the RSC had proved that stars could, and would, work in small space theatres.

The Royal Shakespeare Company had always thought that it should present the plays of Shakespeare's contemporaries, but, in the main, these had not been a box office success. Although The Other Place could be,



and was, a venue that could be used for such plays and the less well-known works of Shakespeare, Nunn thought what was necessary was a theatre that was smaller than the Main House and yet bigger than The Other Place. After *Macbeth* the Company had sent two plays, *Twelfth Night* and *The Three Sisters* to play in small theatres and found spaces. Led by McKellen and with some of the *Macbeth* cast - Bob Peck and Roger Rees particularly - the first date was at the theatre of Christ's Hospital School, built in 1975. Built by Howell, Killick, Partridge and Amis, who had also built the Young Vic, this small theatre with its thrust stage and embracing balcony was just the sort of space that attracted Nunn. As there was space in the old part of the Memorial Theatre (which had survived the fire which necessitated building the present Main theatre) , Nunn drew up plans with his architect Michael Reardon. After some delay, the Swan Theatre as it is now known, the money for which was donated by Mr Fred Koch, was built. (For full details see *This Golden Round*, 1989, Mulryne and Shewring).

Trevor Nunn was determined that this space should be used for plays that came before Shakespeare, his lesser plays and those of his contemporaries, and playwrights that came after him, a period spanning from the 1500s to about 1750. He wanted the repertoire of the Swan to

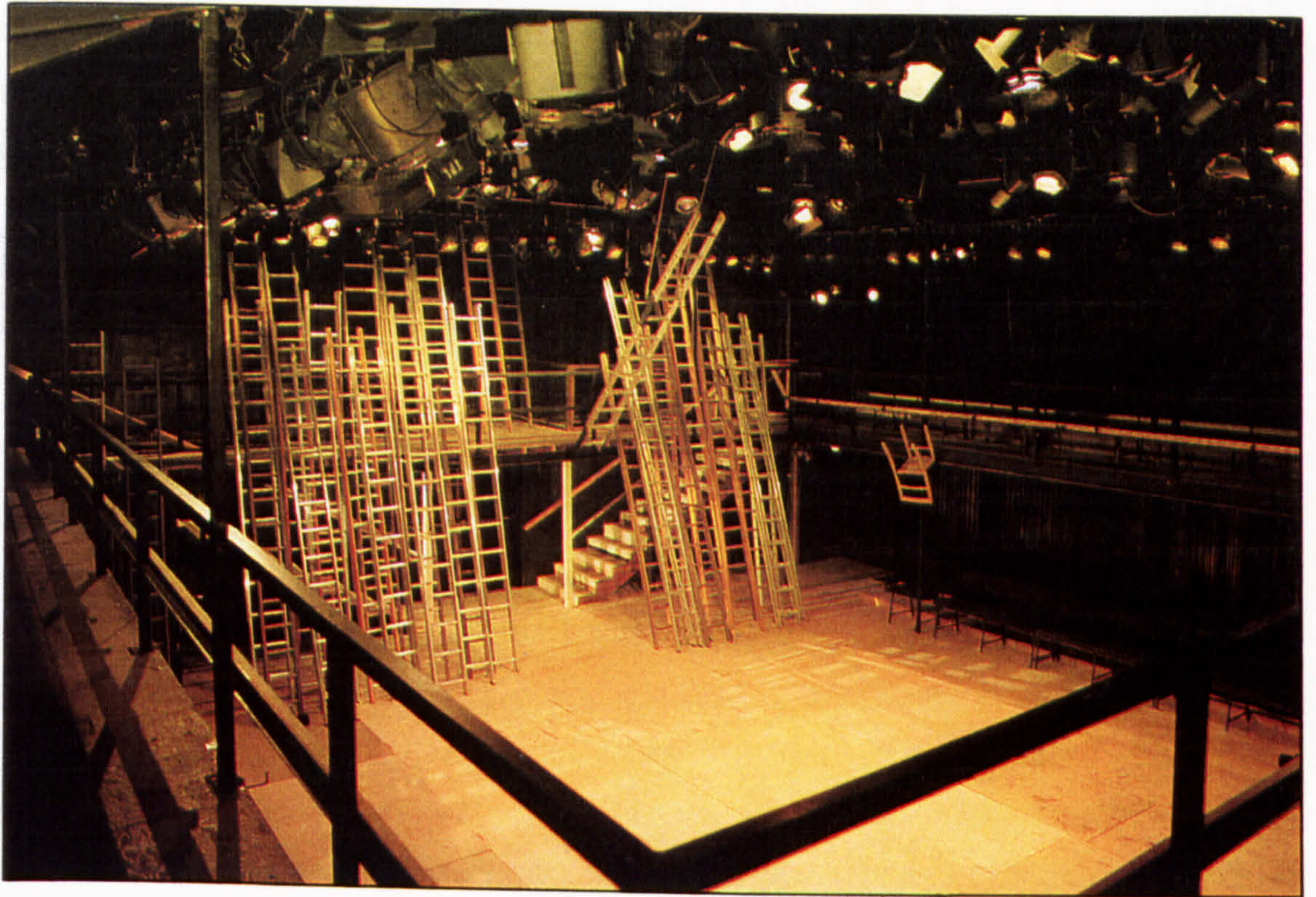
...[reflect] our passion to discover more, research more and present more of the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre - and the theatre post civil war too. (Mulryne and Shewring, 1989, p 7)

What had been seen originally as an experiment, as



THE OTHER PLACE, STRATFORD-upon-AVON

Original Stage



Photograph: Simon MacBride



something of a social duty towards the young, to present the plays of Shakespeare in an intimate manner was now very much accepted, and theatres as various as the Theatre Royal, Bristol: Theatre Clwyd: the Lyric, Hammersmith, to name a few, all had Studios to do small scale classical work as well as modern plays. This chapter has traced this movement, why it started and shows how it became a vigorous part of theatre in which audiences and actors felt more in touch with each other and which concentrated on the text showing that spectacle is not needed to appreciate it. Main House Shakespeare has different needs to small scale productions and the succeeding chapter will explore these needs and differences.

## CHAPTER THREE

'...here is the playhouse now, there you must sit...'

It is proposed, in this chapter, to deal with various aspects of production, acting, verse-speaking, movement and lighting which are needed in all Shakespeare productions and consider how these techniques differ in small space productions. It will then go on to consider the audience's part in a performance and how that differs in different spaces.

Verse-speaking is an important element in the acting of Shakespeare's text so, first of all, current thoughts on verse-speaking are the first point to be taken. One thing that Peter Hall and John Barton insisted (and still insist) on ~~when~~ setting up the Royal Shakespeare Company was that, as Hall expresses it, the verse should be spoken 'correctly'. Most of Shakespeare's work is written in blank verse, the five-stressed line called iambic pentameter, which is the nearest verse to natural speech rhythms in this country. It is a flexible and many faceted medium which, as George T. Wright says

...can lend gravity, dignity, portentousness, even grandeur to statements and utterances...it usually conveys a sense of complex understanding, as if speakers of such lines were aware of more than they ever quite say, or if there were more in their speeches than even they



were aware of. If the language of everyday life or even the language of other forms of poetry seems usually to leave untouched, unsounded, certain depths of human experience, iambic pentameter has seemed for centuries to reach these depths and to make their resonances audible. (Wright, 1988, p 5)

The director, Peter Hall, expresses his thought in a different, but no less interesting way

...Shakespeare expresses everything by what he says. His characters have an ability to describe and illustrate what they are feeling as they are feeling it. So his actors have to give the impression of creating the text while they experience the emotion. This is hard; and has nothing to do with naturalistic acting, where feeling is always paramount... (Hall, 1993, p 345)

But the primary duty of the actor is to be heard, as well as to speak the verse with understanding. To do this they have to breathe properly. As Cecily Berry, the renowned voice coach of the Royal Shakespeare Company says

We know we need a good supply of breath to give voice power, resonance and flexibility. We know that we need its power when working on a classical text where the thoughts are long and often span a number of lines; where, if we

break that span we do not quite honour  
the meaning, or cannot quite twist the  
pay-off line in a way we want to get the  
full...value out of a speech,  
(Berry,1987, pp25/6)

She goes on to say

The further we go in integration of  
breath and thought - and by thought I  
mean the utterance of character charged  
with whatever feelings he may have - we  
begin to experience how the thought  
itself is moving, and the quality of the  
thought becomes active. We see that how  
we share the breath is how we share the  
thought.(Berry,1987, p 26)

John Barton also emphasises breathing properly when  
speaking iambic pentameter saying,

You breathe at the end of the verse  
lines. I myself believe that in  
Shakespeare's later verse it is still  
right more often than not to phrase with  
the verse line...I think such verse is in  
part naturalistic writing by Shakespeare.  
(Barton,1984,p 36)

As we shall see, later on, Trevor Nunn thinks that one



of the important elements of a small scale production is that the audience can be conscious of the actors' breathing, and so, if Berry is correct, then in a small space the audience ought more readily to share and understand the thought.

Peter Hall tells his actors that

The weight runs on to the end of the line where the verb usually is. At the end of the line without a full stop, you get the expectancy of what is coming at the caesura in the next line, so make toward that. Breathe where there is a full-stop - at the end of the line, or in the caesura breaks; sometimes you have to take an imperceptible breath in between. (Lowen, 1990, p 27)

Hall always uses the First Folio text as he considers this to be the nearest punctuation that Shakespeare intended, though Stanley Unwin of the English Touring Company always gives his actors unpunctuated texts, letting them find their own sense and rhythm. Whatever text is used, as Hall says

It may need a beat, an elision, but every single line in Shakespeare will scan. Your [the actors] business is to find and keep as close to the five beats of the iambic pentameter as possible and then decided on what's right for you in terms of emphasis and colour. (Lowen, 1990, p 26)

He concedes that

It is tricky to hold in balance both the mathematics of the verse and the emotion and thought behind it...but like jazz you can do anything you like with it, once you have found the beat. (Lowen,1990,p xv):

Furthermore, Hall thinks that

Key words must be reconciled with the beat...Find the beat, the ongoing rhythm: then you can do anything...[this is not] a frightful imprisonment: it's the very opposite, it frees you, and the new discipline will add to your strength. (Lowen,1990,p 29)

Actors, such as Dame Judi Dench, Sir John Gielgud and Tim Piggott-Smith have all agreed with Hall, saying once you have mastered the art, everything else, meaning, emotion, breathing, feeling all fall into place.

According to George T. Wright,1988, the iambic pentameter is

Long enough to accomodate a good mouthful of English words, long enough too to require most of its lines to break their



phrasing somewhere, it also resists the tendency to break in half. In fact, it *cannot* do so. A midline pause, wherever it appears, leaves two stressed syllables on one side and three on the other. For iambic pentameter, however highly patterned its syntax, is by nature asymmetrical. (Wright, 1988, p 5)

...What makes it (iambic pentameter) even more specific is its uncanny capacity to vary the metrical norm without fundamentally violating it. (Wright, 1988, pp 5/6)

This advice, given by these four authorities, is, of course, common for all productions of Shakespeare's plays and is as salutary for a small space production as it is for a main house one. The basic advice is good for everywhere. But, as Peter Hall points out in his *Diaries* (1983, pp 314/5)

By doing Shakespeare in a tiny room you do actually sidestep the main problem we moderns have with Shakespeare - rhetoric. We don't like rhetoric, we mistrust it: our actors can't create it, and our audiences don't respond to it. So how on earth do you do a great deal of Shakespeare? It's the problem that will often confront us at the Olivier and at the Barbican. The subtlety I saw in the *Macbeth* [Trevor Nunn's 1976/7 production at the Donmar]...was only possible because of the scale.

Actors have to adjust to scale in speaking verse. Those who return from a long spell in television find that projecting their voice is the most demanding aspect of their craft to rediscover. As John Nettles told students at the Shakespeare Institute in 1993, his greatest difficulty was to reach the back of the Memorial Theatre when he had been used, in *Bergerac*, to having a camera a few inches from his face which enabled him to speak conversationally. In a small space not so much projection is needed, but small spaces have their own difficulties, and cannot, again, be treated as a television camera. Although the actual small space need be no bigger than a large drawing room, the audience is disposed, as we have noted, in an unusual configuration, and the actor has to find the right level of projection to include all the audience, even those in the balconies.

Some spaces, too, have what actors call a dead acoustic. Barry Foster, Apementus in Trevor Nunn's production of *Timon of Athens* (discussed under) found that in the Young Vic 'we had to project quite as much as in a pros arch theatre' (see letter in Appendix 7). When the Swan was opened the actors found, after acting in the Main House, that they had problems. One of the greatest was that the audience was all around them, and also they had to contend with the galleries as well as the thrust stage. Cecily Berry thinks that when a member of the audience cannot see a face, he thinks that he cannot hear the words. She writes

It's a psychological factor that if you don't see you think you cannot hear. That area [the Swan stage] is a very difficult one. So we get some people very near, and some people a long way away, and also the problems of a thrust



stage, so that if you are forward or facing one way, you will always have your back to someone. So what do we do about it? You can't just speak out loud or the people in front of you will get blasted, and anyway the character will lose credibility, it will not seem natural. The answer is in the energy of the consonants: you have to be very clearly spoken, not loud, but really clear. And by this I don't mean over-emphasising the consonants, I mean feeling their energy and through that the energy of the language - and finishing them off properly. You have really to think about the words and feel that energy carrying forward, consciously. (Mulryne and Shewring, 1989, p 151)

So, what the actor has to do in any theatre is to find the rhythm of the verse, for that contains the sense, then he has to find the placement and pitch required for that particular space. His awareness of the audience, too, is crucial especially when it is not just 'out front', but surrounding him. He has to remember, also, that not all the audience can see his face, especially if they are above him.

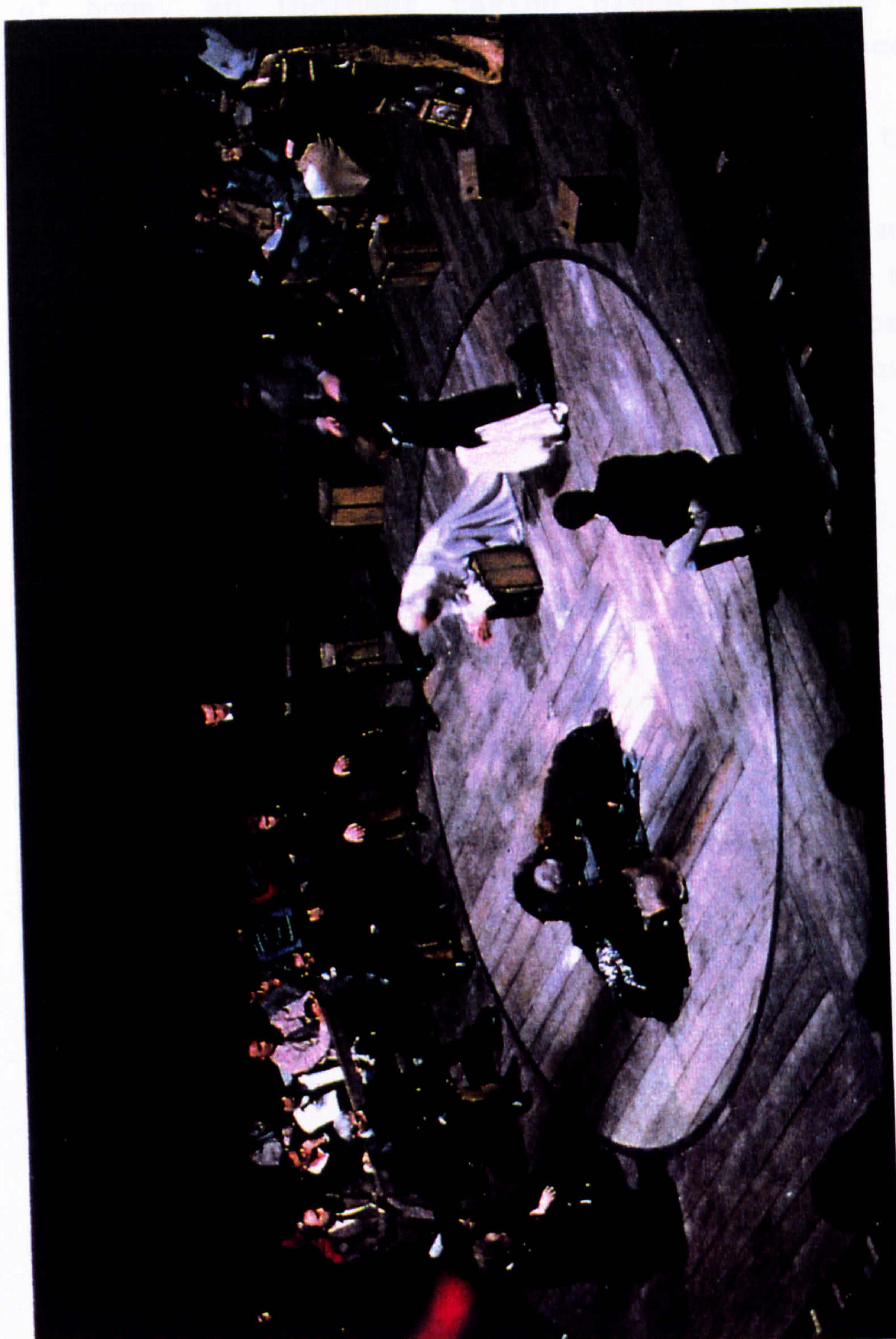
As Adrian Lester says (see letter in Appendix 7) an actor has to adjust his technique when appearing in different sizes of theatre, for acting in a small space has to be more subtle than acting in a larger space. The smallest gesture shows, while the more expansive ones needed in a large theatre are too overwhelming. In a small space the actors have a close connection with the audience when it surrounds them. It is almost as if



TREVOR NUNN'S PRODUCTION OF

MACBETH

AT THE OTHER PLACE



note how the actors are sitting just in front of

John Barton, the audience

courtesy of The Royal Shakespeare Company



audience and actors were two teams playing charades. The realism of the scale, both actors and audience being the same size means that the world inhabited seems to be more real 'than when the actors are observed from a distance. For example, if you look out of your window at home, an incident taking place in front of that window is more compelling than one taking place at the end of the street. In a small space the audience becomes more part of the action, more part of the story being told than if they are at a distance. Also the experience of being *in an audience* is more intense in that one is more aware of one's fellow members than in a larger theatre where one is sitting back comfortably in an armchair. As Ian McKellen put it in a conversation with John Barton

...I'm speaking on the stage and sympathising with the character's predicament. And if I can do that the audience can do it as well and are brought face up against it. When you are in the theatre - and this is why television will never supercede the theatre as far as Shakespeare is concerned - you are not only listening to and watching the actors but you are aware that the person next door to you is doing so also. And the person along the row behind you and in front of you. And when those words reverberate round the theatre you are reminded of your own humanity and your relationship with other people's humanity. (Barton, 1984, p 183/4)

John Barton, developing the conversation, thought that the theatre itself controls the performance, that a large theatre becomes lord of the actors rather than its

servant, a sentiment with which McKellen agrees

And it's surprising how doing a play in a small theatre can release it in some way. When I played Henry V I worked in a very small theatre [the old Wolsey Theatre in Ipswich]...I imagined the army was the audience and I knelt down at the front of the stage and whispered 'Once more unto the breach, dear friends'...I was able to get just as much passion into that and bravado and patriotism by whispering as I could by shouting. *In fact I think I got more because it was more real.* [my italics]  
(Barton, 1984, p 185)

The director of that production, Robert Chetwyn, said that as the theatre was so small, he decided to use the whole of it, having actors make entrances through the theatre which, as he said, was quite unusual for the early 1960s (Leslie Gibson, 1990 p 38). The local press was enthusiastic, the dramatic critic A.G. writing in the *East Anglian Times*, 6th February 1963, said

Produced with great depth of understanding, there is colour, warmth, wit and a wealth of masterly touches. The intimacy of the medieval apron stage is achieved by the characters spilling into the audience...and by this device the audience is drawn into the very heart of the play.

It was one of the first productions that achieved a



fusion of audience and actors in an intimacy that is only possible in a small space, and which Barton (same source) calls one of the best things that we can get.

X Movement in a small theatre needs a different approach, too. The actors, being surrounded by the audience in a thrust or courtyard formation, or in the round, have to change positions more often than if they were moving on a large stage with a proscenium arch, or on an apron stage which juts from that arch. The acting in a proscenium arch theatre is more frontal while in the other theatres the actors have to remember that their backs are always presented to part of the audience and that they are also seen in profile by some part of the audience, while in a picture-frame the whole audience is seeing either the front view or the profile: it is the same for everyone not partly so for one portion of the audience and different for another. There is no place where the actor can 'hide', that is, be inconspicuous to the audience, for he is always facing some part of it. The scale is different and more natural, for there is really no back of stage in a small space in which to be almost invisible: someone is always watching: the actor is always in the view of some person and so the acting has to be more committed, more of the time. For a director, moving the actors, especially principal actors, is of paramount importance.

If a director is not used to a thrust stage, or a theatre with entrances and exits through the audience, he has to remember not to treat it like a picture-frame stage. He has to use the whole space and envelope the audience in the action. In speaking soliloquies, the director has to make sure that the actor does not speak them out front as he would in a proscenium arch theatre, but to include the whole audience. Guy Henry, in speaking the Prologue in the RSC production of *Henry VIII* (1997), entered and while walking down stage looked to left and right, smiling at the audience: standing centre stage he looked from side to side, and up to the galleries, while speaking: then as he exited he again

included the side seats in his gaze. He exploited the Swan theatre beautifully, unlike Louis Ouimette, in the Tom Patterson Theatre in Stratford, Ontario, who was directed to speak out front, down stage, on the thrust stage of the Tom Patterson Theatre, and was moreover placed in a spotlight, which was very alienating to the audience (see under).

Imogen Stubbs says that actors feel very exposed on the Swan stage and that it is not a good house when it is half empty (but, then is any half empty theatre a good house?). She remarks how, in the Swan, the actors have to be very mobile.

The eye-line problem is difficult. You feel your head moving around all the time, like one of those dogs at the back of a car. You do it in order to take everyone into your vision, and that's really important...it's the business of exits and entrances that's hard at the Swan. You can't make flamboyant exits. They're clumsy. It's pretty clumsy getting onto the stage and off. It's a very limited perimeter...You do feel you can hold the audience in the hollow of your hand, and they hold you like that. If you can really get the concentration between you very good, then you can do anything. (Mulryne and Shewring, 1989, p109)

Directors, such as Katie Mitchell and Deborah Warner, who work more often than not in small spaces, are ingenious in how they use their actors *vis-à-vis* an audience. In *Richard 11* at the Cottesloe (1995),



Warner chose a tournament arrangement of seats so that the whole production was seen in profile by all the audience, except for one row in the galleries where the audience had a frontal view. From these seats the groupings looked entirely different, of course. It was noticeable that, on many occasions, Richard (Fiona Shaw) started the scene at one end of the space and finished it at the other. As she walked the length of the theatre, the whole cast had to turn to watch her, and no portion of the audience was starved of the principal actor during that scene, all members being in touching distance of her. This action also gave a marvellous fluidity to the scene. Using this arrangement of seats also gave Warner doors at both end, so that opposing factions could use different doors and different ends of the theatre, making entrances and exits very varied. Warner also had a balcony which was used for Richard's confrontation with Northumberland in Act 3 scene iii. The scale throughout was human, and so the audience could really feel that it was watching, not a spectacle, but real events. This is something that Mitchell can also create by the way she disposes of her actors, keeping the scale human rather than heroic (for discussion on her production of *3 Henry VI* see under).

What the audience can more easily see in a small space theatre is the actors' faces. The difference in acting for screen, small or big, is that the camera seems able to pick up the characters' thoughts. An eyebrow raised, a mouth twitching, eyes filling with tears, these small gestures, often nuances, convey emotions very subtly. Often, watching great movie actors, the spectators on the set think that they are doing nothing, but the camera catches the thoughts. In a large theatre, these subtle nuances do not work, nor do small gestures. In a small theatre the acting is somewhere between the minute but intense effects of working before a camera, and the broad, frontal effects needed in working in a

large theatre. In a small space we can see the actors' faces quite closely, and very often, the eyes. These are not enlarged as they would be on the screen, but they are certainly larger than we would see them in a main theatre. The faces, the bodies, are the same scale as our own, not people we see at a distance, but people we see close to. We are in touching distance. Because of this nearness, this human scale, the acting has to be very subtle, very committed, almost non-theatrical. It cannot be entirely natural, because we are not watching people from our window, but events that have been scripted centuries ago. The events taking place here and now in the twentieth century in this theatre are depicting events that occurred in the imagination of a poet nearly four hundred years ago, realized by actors of the twentieth century. We, and the actors, know that the events on stage are not real in the sense that every day events are real, but they are creating a reality that is imaginative. In a small space they have to create those events in a more natural way, a more human way, than they would have to do to create the same events in a larger theatre. Moreover, both actors and audience are in the same room: there is no divide between a high platform stage and the audience as there is in a proscenium arch theatre. In a small space the actors are on the same level (or only just above) the audience. We are, therefore, all together in the same space, both real and imaginary, and the same time, again, both real and imaginary. What the actor has to do is make us believe that we are actually in the imaginary time and space with him. He has our imaginations to convince, and, in a small space, it is submitted, those imaginations are more accessible because they are nearer: he has less space to energize, the playing can become more immediate, for the audience can become part of the action. As Barry Foster says 'the truth, and only the truth will convince' (see Letter in Appendix 7).



Imogen Stubbs expresses the difference between acting on the two stages [Main House and Swan] in Stratford, thus

I do find the Main Stage...quite difficult. You feel that because of the shape of it, it is in the worse sense like being on a big screen and whatever you do is part of the overall picture. It's either going to be embarrassingly big for the person playing opposite - which is a big problem because you can't believe in each other's performances - or it's too big for the front rows and too small for the back rows. To find the right size on a big stage is very difficult...Whereas in the Swan they're [the audience] are thrown right into it...*at the Swan the audience has contributed half - more than half - the performance.* And I think they know that. It makes people feel quite proud to have been there. If it's good they've made it good. *Whereas at the Main House, whether it's good or bad people feel very excluded.* (my itals) (Mulryne and Shewring, 1989, p 107)

Stubbs's feeling that the audience have created the performance is a potent one. The argument that seeing a performance in a small space is more of a shared experience between actor and audience can be extended to argue that it is more of a shared experience, too, among members of the audience. Seeing another part of the audience across the stage need not feel strange, for a member of the audience can realise that he is sharing the same emotions with other people, emotions he

recognises by their expressions and body language. Our own emotions seem intensified by sharing them with other people. Many people have had the experience of laughing heartily in a cinema while watching a comedy, but, seeing the same film on TV or video alone at home, not laughing at all. The jokes have been just as funny, but the experience has not been shared and has not been affected by the presence of other, laughing, people. Seeing other people react seems to increase the total emotion felt by each person who is sharing the happiness or the pain both of the actors and fellow members of the audience.

How the audience is manipulated to achieve this heightened sense of emotion is part of the skill of the director. In larger theatres attempts have been made to break down the barriers of a proscenium or open space stage. In his 1984 production of *Coriolanus* in the Olivier Theatre, a vast open stage in a thousand-seater auditorium, Peter Hall, had the idea of seating some of the audience on stage and making them take part as the crowd. This was distracting (although the production was mainly modern dress) for, as I wrote soon afterwards

One saw ladies with Hermès bags and Gucci shoes; exhibitionist girls determined to be looked at: awkward men in tweed jackets and open-necked shirts and sandals: middle-aged couples not sure of what they were doing, plus enthusiastic members of amateur dramatic societies relishing their chance of appearing on the stage of the National Theatre...it was really distracting...Benedict Nightingale wrote (*New Statesman*, 20th December, 1984) 'Myself, I've seen more suddenness and ponderosity in the throng



at a bring-and-buy sale than at the National last Saturday...(Leslie Gibson 1990,p 145)

The difference is, that though actors were rushing through the audience, using gangways for exits and entrances, the effect could not be the same as if the same actions were taking place in a small theatre. We were being treated as spectators, the actors were acting at us, not, in spite of the on stage members, including the audience. Though the on-stage audience were taking part, this was an alienating device. Suddenly, members of the audience were being asked to be actors, coming out of their character of audience and assisters, to become members of the cast. They were not being included as members of the audience, but had become a hybrid. The rest of the audience were not observing their emotions as fellow beings, but judging them as actors. It was inappropriate in that space, and, probably, in any space, for it was confusing and added nothing to the telling of the story. On the other hand, the actors entering the audience, even sitting by them can be effective in a small space. For example, in Bill Alexander's production of *Cymbeline* (1987) at The Other Place, for the first scene the actors playing the Gentlemen sat in the audience and told the story of what had happened before the play started to the members of the audience by whom they were sitting - they made one believe that one was actually sitting in that court and it made a startling start to the play. The audience was emotionally at one with the actors, and so increased the emotion throughout the space, as one was asked to be a participant not just a spectator. It was also an effect that could not have been realized in a larger theatre, for it was too small an action to have carried in a larger space.

What does happen in small space productions is that the

actors are aware of the audience as much as the audience is aware of them. In all performances, actors have to have some awareness of the audience, but in a large theatre, particularly in a open stage, such as the Olivier, an apron theatre (Barbican) or a proscenium arch theatre, the audience is just that much further away and also, as these theatres have to be more brightly lit, the lights prevent any real eye contact. In acting a curious duality takes place in that the actor is both himself and the character he is playing. The audience has to believe in the character more than in the actor. It is true that some very popular actors always portray themselves, that is they play parts which fit their own characters, but the protean actors, those that become the character always have this duality. In a small space, the audience has the advantage, as has been said, of being able to see the actors' features, especially the eyes, more closely. But the actors can also see the audiences features as well, especially when they deliberately address the audience as, for example, Simon Russell Beale did as Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida* (see under) or if the actor is saying a soliloquy. This entails an eye contact between actor and audience which makes for a more intimate and living experience. It produces that intimacy of which Ian McKellen speaks

...that intimacy in which the audience can catch the breath being inhaled before it is exhaled on a line, and feel the excitement and the certainty that what is happening is for real..(Barton,1984,p185)

Both sound and light can also help to influence the audience by creating mood. Imagine a scene of a man sitting in a room thinking: he gets up, walks around:



he opens the door and goes out. In the first showing, the light is sombre and the music could be called doom-laden. The viewer's imagination is caught - what is the man's problem? He seems to be troubled - will he meet with tragedy? The second time, with the man doing the same actions, the lights are bright, the music, romantic. The viewer's imagination tells him that the man is going out for an enjoyable evening, that perhaps he is thinking of proposing to his girl. All that has happened is that the lighting and music has changed. This happens in all theatre, but, in a small space, however, a full orchestra will not be available, nor, on the whole, are very elaborate lighting banks. Katie Mitchell, for *3 Henry VI* had a sound tape made by Andrea J. Cox of all the sounds mentioned in the text, on a natural scale, and not amplified extensively. Added to that was a small band of musicians playing mainly shawns and bagpipes, which combined with the actors beating drums, and singing plainsong. All these elements created a totally unmodern sound, but was not overbearing for sound has to be more natural in a small space, and audiences should hear the sounds as in real life. Also, intimate sounds, personal sounds, can have a telling effect in a small space. The slippery sound of leather boots, the creaking of stays, the rustle of hair as it is brushed, the sound of a kiss, these are very intimate sounds that can be heard in a small space, and can be very evocative, but which would not travel in a large theatre. The minuteness of these sounds add to the authenticity of the production and gives it a veracity and vividness, making the audience feel that it is really there, not watching a play.

Much the same can be said of lighting - it should be used to enhance the reality of the scene, not its theatricality. To have an actor in a spotlight while he says a soliloquy might be effective, indeed often is, on a large stage in a large auditorium, but in a small

space it makes the actor too isolated, particularly as he has a splendid chance, if he is in a natural light, to actually take the audience into his confidence (which is really what soliloquies should be about). Lighting can create moods, a sense of place or time, but, as it has been said before, Shakespeare does it all with words and elaborate lighting effects are not needed. One thing that lighting can do is to make shadows on back walls, thus creating the sense of more people, which in a small space can be very effective for a crowd scene.

In a large theatre the audience is something the actor has to conquer. The late Ralph Richardson wrote

The audience is strange. When the curtain goes up the single units sitting together, without being conscious of it, slide, merge and melt until they form a single entity; losing a little of their single selves they create a new dimension, they become one; this one, compact as it is of humans, is not quite like a human being, it is more like a gas or a ghost. It can flow right up upon the stage, can change the temperature in the house from chill to very warm. It can enter into a play and occupy and take possession there, increase its dimension, light it, sharpen its wit, as good company can. It can solidify, build a tension that is tangible...

All who go to the theatre take part in the performance; they have joined a community and whatever they do is communicated. (Richardson, 1980, p 45)



But, as Imogen Stubbs says, (quoted on p 69 and 72) in a small space the audience is able to be more involved, help to create the performance far more in a small theatre, than in a large one.

All actors will tell you that after a period of rehearsal they need an audience, otherwise, the work feels incomplete. Something else has to happen to make a performance and the audience are the most important part of the procedure. Not the play, not the cast, not even the space. The audience, though, cannot be passive, for it has to take part in the performance for it is the engaged imaginations of audience and actor that make a performance live. Adrian Lester, Rosalind in Declan Donnellan's production of *As You Like It* says that imagination is the actor's best weapon (see Letter in Appendix 7). Audience and actors collude with each other to make believe that what is happening on stage is as real as their lives are outside the theatre. The audience knows that it is watching actors: the actors know that they are saying words that have been written about something that is imaginary not words about real happenings. The actors know the end of the play, they know what is going to happen which is something that we cannot know in real life, for we do not know what is going to happen at all. The actors know that they are not real people, they are creatures of the author's imagination. Yet they have to make the audience believe that they are real. They are not just people in disguise, though both they and the audience know that they are. They ask a suspension of belief from the audience, so that Adrian Lester, a black actor who is 6 foot 2 inches tall, can make you believe he is a princess at a court in France: Trevor Eve, one-time Eddie Shoestring in a television series, can make an

audience think that he is a jealous king in long ago Sicily: Elizabeth McKechnie transforms herself from a Greek warrior Queen to a Fairy Queen, and they all do this by way of their imagination. The audience know that they are really Adrian Lester, Trevor Eve and Elizaeth McKechnie out side the theatre, but within it they are Rosalind, Leontes and Hippolyta/Titania. The actors know that the audience knows this, but, at the same time, it is composed of individuals, each with his own worries and concerns, who have to be welded into a homogeneous whole who will believe in them as other people, who have to be manipulated to laugh, cry, and, above all, enjoy itself.

But, however welded together the audience becomes, it is always the Other to the actors: the Other which has to be magicked. The audience is at a distance from the actors in a large theatre with a proscenium arch, or in a theatre where the apron extends from that arch, and is raised on a high platform and is more the Other than an audience which surrounds the actors and which can be seen clearly. It can be argued that in a large, more conventional theatre, the Other is all that the audience can be however moving and powerful the performance is, for the audience is always aware that it is watching a display, something that is happening afar, something which it is regarding. It is the peculiar function of a small scale performance, where the audience surrounds the actors, that the audience ceases to become the Other and becomes part of the performance - as Imogen Stubbs says at least half of it. The audience is caught up in the same orbit as the actors. For if the actors are on more or less the same level as the audience, its perceptions of the actors change. Instead of small full-length figures performing at a distance, the actors are on the same level, the same scale as the audience. Their bodies are the same size, their faces can be more clearly seen, and their breathing can be heard. It is



not the same as in film or in television where the scale of the actor's bodies and faces change from close-up to long distance, and which distorts the human body. In a small scale theatre the actors can be seen and heard as people are seen and heard in everyday life. A member sitting in a gallery has a different aspect, but it is the same aspect as someone would have who was sitting on a balcony overlooking, say, a street.

Going to the theatre is not just what you see: how you see it can also be important - so *where* you see a play can be almost as important as what you are seeing. A theatre is a triple space. The stage and what happens on it is the reason for being there: the entrance and foyer should be welcoming so that the audience is not crowded or herded into the auditorium which should have atmosphere, and help create a feeling of excitement. The old Victorian theatres are a fine example of this with their gilt and glitter. But in these theatres, and in the large, modern theatres that have been built since the war, the attitude of the audience is different, their expectations are different to those going to a smaller theatre. The Coliseum, or even in the smaller Richmond, Surrey, theatre, both by Frank Matcham, evoke a feeling of history and magic, they are spectacular in themselves, and an audience expects theatricality from them. An audience can sit back and demand 'Amuse me', and an actor standing centre stage is the focus of an audience's attention. But it is a position where he *commands* he does not invite the audience to participate. Whereas, in a small space, the actor is always visible and he has to *invite* the audience to participate.

In small space theatres the audience is wrapped round the actors and it is an exciting moment when a member of the cast addresses you: or to have an actor abseil down

beside you: to have someone 'killed' in the seat next to you: to see a procession pass by you, down an aisle. These moments bring a reality to the performance that is not obtainable in a large theatre. Even if a ramp or stairs are built so the actor can come off the stage, in a large theatre, he is always departing from the play in a way that does not happen in a small theatre where the whole theatre becomes the location for the play. The audience are part of that setting, not observers watching the action.

Both Ian Mackintosh and Tim Furby, theatre architects, think that audiences should be a little bit uncomfortable when seated. Furby told Peter Holland

You still hear people saying 'there isn't a lot of room, is there?', because they want a comfortable armchair. We were always of the opinion that they should have to fight a little, they should have to be a bit uncomfortable. (*Shakespeare Survey*, 47 1994, p 119)

But what is comfortable? People of different heights need different leg-room, and, it is submitted that all theatres should have this leg-room for even the tallest person. In many small space theatres, though, there is this leg-room, and the actors are spared the noise of the audience fidgeting to get comfortable. If the performance is riveting enough the audience will keep still if they are comfortable, but nothing will keep them from fidgeting if they are cramped. The Swan, The Other Place, the Young Vic and the Pit, all modern, new theatres, and all small are among the most comfortable, and so actors are spared the audience wriggling in



uncomfortable seats. But Furby has a point in that in theatres we cannot behave as we can when watching TV at home, sprawled in our armchairs. A theatre seat should support our backs and makes us sit up. As Tim Furby says

The Swan is as far as it can be from television where you sit back and let it happen in front of you. The Main House has always the problem that you are sitting back in comfortable seats and the performance goes on without you: it is a spectacle. (*Shakespeare Survey 1994*, p 119)

When Trevor Nunn was talking to Michael Reardon about the building of the Swan

...he made the point very early on that he wanted a space in which the audience and the actors were inhabitants of the same space, living in the same world. (*Shakespeare Survey*, p 118)

In a small space theatre, the actors often use the same doors through which the audience pass to be seated. This also gives the feeling that both groups are in the same room. They are so near together that they are breathing the same air, smelling the same smells, feeling the same atmosphere and, above all, sharing in a magical experience in a totally different way from the experience of watching a play in a large theatre. It is an experience which is only obtainable when the audience is fully aware of the interplay between actors

and audiences which is uniquely available in a small space theatre. There both audience and actors are aware of each other in an intimate way, where even small actions can be seen, small sounds be heard. There is no such thing as a small space, only a number of small spaces. Some small space theatres, those in which the audience surrounds the actors, have the ability to connect audience and actors in a remarkable way. As in Elizabethan times, when actors had to adapt performances to a whole host of different spaces so, nowadays, actors and directors have to perform in a variety of spaces. Always, though, in a small space the actor has a more prominent position than in a larger theatre. By that, I mean that the audience sees him on a more human scale - he is, in fact, the same size as a member of the audience. He is not seen as a distant object, for, even if one sits near the front in a large theatre, the actors are still figures in a landscape not people in a room which you are also inhabiting. Therefore, the actor takes on more prominence - he is always visible, and the smallest action or sound he makes is always seen and heard. This makes the centre of attention entirely different for the audience, and draws it into the play, stimulating its collective imagination. It is the contention of this thesis that the revelation of the truth of a text performed in a small space needs and gets a different intensity, and a different centre, from that in a large theatre. Because the audience is not distracted by elaborate scenery and effects: because its attention is engaged on the playing of the text, the concentration needed is more intense. The effort from the actors is greater: greater because of the intimacy: greater because they have nowhere to hide. For both actors and audience share the same space, are on the same scale and emotions have to be more explicit but more heightened. There can be no rhetoric, there must be more sincerity. The artifice from the actors is there, but it is a more natural artifice: the participation from the audience is compelled more intensely.



## CHAPTER FOUR

'... on this unworthy scaffold...'

Patrice Pavis in *Languages of the Stage: Essays in Semiology of the Theatre*, 1993, is of the opinion that meaning (in a play) is bound up with the use made of the stage, and what we see is but a vision of a vision. Certainly, nowadays, there is much talk of production and design concepts. This chapter will explore this notion that directors and designers have to consider when planning a production and how these considerations have to differ in Main Houses to small spaces.

First we should understand what is meant by "concept". Every reading of a book or play is interpreted by the reader. In the case of a play, it is possible to produce what one considers to be the ideal performance in one's own head. Just as an actor has his interpretation of a character which he is considering playing as he reads the play, so a director has to have his image of how the play should look and sound on stage. Everyone brings his or her own imagination and subjectivity to the given text. But how far should this interpretation go? There is a philosophical argument, largely perpetrated by French philosophers who maintain that the reader (director) is more important than the writer. (For full discussion see *From Prague to Paris*, Meriquor, 1986). The argument for Shakespeare runs that as we cannot possibly know what Shakespeare meant and that our society is totally different from his, and as we are not, as Harley Granville Barker said, Elizabethans so we cannot

present the plays as he intended. Added to that, as our theatres are technically more advanced than his the argument continues, let us make the plays socially relevant to our age, and interpret them in our own image. For instance, a production of *The Tempest* can be set in outer space, the courtiers finding Prospero and Miranda on a far-flung planet is admissable. It could not, of course, be an interpretation of which Shakespeare could possibly have thought. But, because the play is also about men and women, and the emotions of love, jealousy and forgiveness, this setting is valid and one in which these emotions could still be effective and moving. Many productions have been set in different periods, other than Elizabethan, and many have provided an interesting and absorbing evening in the theatre. The present writer has seen *The Winter's Tale* for example, in Elizabethan, Charles 1, Regency and Edwardian costumes, besides those of an undefined period. *Hamlet* has been presented in every period from Elizabethan to modern, but, nonetheless, remains an exciting play, even when Hamlet appears in Lycra shorts. It is the language that works the most magic, but, nonetheless, an inappropriate, or too noticeable costume can distract. Peter Brook points out in *The Shifting Point* (1988, p 77) that doing a play as a solemn duty with too much respect, will not allow the director to use his creative abilities. In other words, the director must not be overwhelmed by Shakespeare. Brook says that the directorial process is more "a sense of direction" than an alienating concept

A "directorial conception" is an image which preceded the first day's work, while a "sense of direction" crystallizes into an image at the very end of the process. The director needs only one conception - which he must find in life,



not art - which comes from asking himself what an act of theatre is doing in the world, why it is there...acting is an act, that is act has action, that the place of the performance is in the world and that everyone is under the influence of what is performed. (Brook,1988,p6)

The sense of direction then is organic: the performance grows in rehearsal, the audience is included in the calculation. Even Michael Bogdanov, considered by many critics to be one of the most iconoclastic of directors, agrees, saying that he accepts a lot of input from actors/

Of course, I provide the framework, the lasso for the project, a main line, but there are a thousand routes between A and B. (Cook,1989,p 85)

Brook warns against too much enthusiasm. He writes/

...the danger that also has to be watched is when any of the artists or scholars dealing with a play by Shakespeare allow their love and excitement and enthusiasm to blind them to the fact that their interpretation can never be complete. There's an enormous danger that takes a very precise form and leads to a form of acting that one's seen over many years, a form of directing, a form of designing, *which proudly presents very subjective versions of the play without*

*a glimmer of awareness that they might be diminishing the play - on the contrary, a vain belief...that this is the play and more...not only Shakespeare's play but Shakespeare's play as made into sense by such-and-such an individual.(my italics.)* (Brook, 1988,p 77)

Peter Hall, too, is against too great an emphasis on a concept, saying

We have been going through a period of expressionism in Shakespeare production.

At it's crudest it's putting Lear's Fool in a bowler hat. Often it is the approach of directors who are busy demonstrating what a piece does for them, which can take you a long way from the work itself. (*The Sunday Times*: 2nd July, 1995)

Brook was born in 1925 when the leading literary critics were still A.C.Bradley, John Dover Wilson and Harley Granville Barker. Peter Hall, too, was at school and university when these critics were still being taught. He and Trevor Nunn were at Cambridge and attended the lectures of F.R. Leavis and so were before the time when the ideas of the French philosophers were being taught in universities, and before the time of Jonathan Dollimore, Lisa Jardine and Terence Hawkes.

In an interview in *The Evening Standard*, 23rd January, 1997, the actor Sam West said



Too often directors update Shakespeare for no real reason. I generally find that the more loyal you are to the period in which a play is written the more people say 'Gosh, it's just like now'... Members of the audience during question-and-answer sessions [would say] ...'But they [the lines] are so modern'. Well, good writing is. Anyway if the actor's intention is correct, you'll get the sense even if you don't know what every word means.

The same edict should apply to a director's intention. A balance has to be obtained from what West (further on in feature) calls 'the heritage crowd' and modernity. Having an overweening concept is less likely to work in a small space. For the focus in a small space is on the actor and what he is saying. The smaller the space, the more prominent he is and the more distorting the concept will be. Peter Brook tells a story that when rehearsing an actor, James Booth, in *King Lear*, the actor produced a skipping rope and asked to do the whole scene skipping. Brook's reply was

the tragedy of having to do a play that is so marvellous is that you can't do that kind of thing. Only where you really feel confident that bits are badly written or boring does one have the freedom to invent skipping ropes and so forth. (Brook, 1988, p 87)

To 'amuse' your audience, to be afraid that they might be bored, to introduce extraneous comic 'business' (to

use actor's terminology ) is to patronize the text. In the simpler conditions of a small space what can work in a large theatre and be funny can be highly embarrassing in the confines of a room and the intimacy that that brings. In 1978 the audience who had come to see *The Taming of the Shrew* in the Main House was startled, just as the play was about to begin, by an altercation between a drunken member of the audience and one of the attendants. Several of the audience became involved, some walked out and complained to the Management. Those members of the audience who were Stratford regulars recognized Johnathan Price and Paola Dionisotti who were the leading players that year. The director, Michael Bogdanov had chosen this way of opening the play and so lead us into the Prologue. It could be considered a witty way of reminding us that drunkenness is unpleasant and that anything can happen to us when we are under the influence of drink. But, many members of the audience, certainly on the first night, when the researcher saw the performance, were distressed and disturbed. An eminent producer (Jack Lynn of Knightsbridge Productions) said to the researcher in the interval that he thought the opening was a gratuitous piece of self-indulgence that was unjustified, while the American couple sitting next to her were about to leave until she explained that the drunk was the leading actor. Most of the audience was removed from the action and were not necessarily disturbed in a large theatre, might even have found it exciting. But suppose the same incident had taken place in *The Other Place*. Would it not be even more distressing to find yourself next, or even a few feet away from the drunk? A case can be made for Bogdanov's opening when the audience were spectators, but to have a very realistically acted, violently 'drunk' man so close would, surely, be unpermissable. Bogdanov's conception of this scene was just possible in the context of a large production of one of Shakespeare's less profound plays, which is distasteful to many people anyway, and



he was underlining this element, but in the confines of a smaller space would have been overwhelming. Directors are not doing their job if they embarrass their audiences.

Of the eight plays considered under, where the concept is unusual, it is contended, that it was very suitable to the text of the play. It is true that some small space productions are set in a different time from that of Shakespeare's. Trevor Nunn's acclaimed production of *Othello* was set in the American Civil War, a time when it was considered extraordinary for a white girl to marry a black man: at Stratford, Ontario, in the Avon Theatre, the setting was the 1940s, the first time a black man had become a general in the USA army, so the parallel was apt for a transatlantic audience. Nunn's production of *Measure for Measure* was set in Freud's Vienna. Again, the general opinion was that it made an interesting parallel which could have helped the audience appreciate this psychological play. None of these translations hindered the reading of the play because both directors chose to focus on the most important element in the production, that is, the text. Adrian Noble contends that if we come out of the theatre talking about the frocks, the director has failed for what we should be talking about is the verse and the text.

Patrice Pavis (*op.cit.*1993) is of the opinion that the meaning of a play is bound up with the use made of the stage. So the fact that the director is bound by the smallness of the theatre must have some effect on what he deems possible. Certainly, in a small space the actor has a more prominent position than in a large theatre. By that I mean that the audience sees him on a more human scale - he is the same size as a member of the audience. He is not seen as a distant object, for

even if one sits near the front of a large theatre, the actors are still figures in a landscape, not people in a room which one is also inhabiting. Ian McKellen says (to researcher, 1979) that he loves working in the old theatres, the Frank Matcham theatres because when standing centre stage he is the focus of all eyes. Focus, that is the audience sees him. But do they hear the text? Are they not charmed by his charismatic figure and watch rather than listen? The actor has to be important, and in a small space he becomes more important. This must change the concept of the play in the director's mind and imagination. He cannot cheat with effects and he has to be clear about the text and transmit this clarity to the audience by way of the actors.

One of the advantages of working in a small space is, according to Deborah Warner, that story-telling becomes the most important element. She says that working with her underfunded company, Kick

...was invaluable as a means of finding a way of working on Shakespeare, a skill which developed over four years, and all done on a shoestring, on nothing. It was not only a way of working in rehearsal, it was a production style. It was a very simple story-telling which is the foundation of what I aim for each time...I could never arrive with a concept and then spend six weeks making sure it was never proved wrong.

(Cook, 1989, pp 101/104)

Warner is also of the opinion that actors get tired of Shakespeare being experimented with and having someone



coming along with concept. Bill Alexander is another director who likes a plain approach. He thinks directing for a small space is

...easier in many ways in that you have a greater flexibility of tone  
(Cook,1989,p 65)

Declan Donellan also believes that you must let the play speak for itself as Shakespeare is 'so supremely objective, although we kid ourselves that we can interpret him' (Cook: p 94). He feels that a proscenium arch can make such a statement that it overwhelms the play. The Swan, he states, needs no scenery, whereas the Lyttleton and the Barbican 'have a terribly wintry feeling about them' (Mulryne and Shrewring,1995,p 106). He goes onto say

Any actor can be heard in a two thousand seat theatre. But the more you increase volume, and the cubic metres of space the more the actor has to energise, the more you risk increasing the blandness of their performance...Those spaces often force young actors into giving performances of sufficient blandness and crudity that they will carry whereas something smaller but more subtle won't necessarily carry. Directors, too, feel that they have to do their *Hamlet* on a huge stage, in order to prove themselves. But this is a modern invention. (Mulryne and Shrewing,1995, p 106)

Nick Omerod, the designer, thinks that the Olivier is a

good space because the audience on both sides makes those in the centre of the stage feel more secure, but Donellan feels that the energy the actors need to energize that vast stage is too much and the force of the work dissipates. In all these large theatres, the actors feel disconnected with the audience which makes for a performance that lacks electricity. This was very apparent in Trevor Nunn's production of Pam Gems's *The Blue Angel*. Directed back-to-back with *Measure for Measure* as the opening productions of The new Other Place, the two plays, which shared a set, toured in found spaces, with the RSC's own mobile construction. When *The Blue Angel* was transferred to the West End with the same set just put arbitrarily on the stage, it flopped. Though the cast was the same, they failed to energize the space, and the cabaret feeling was lost. Instead of inhabiting a seedy German nightclub, we were watching a somewhat dingy musical. Ian Mackintosh echoes Donellan in disliking vast, modern, spaces, saying

The translation of the National and the RSC from the warm embrace and tight focus of the smaller and more human-scaled Old Vic and Aldwych to the wide open spaces of the South Bank and Barbican... failed to achieve the hoped-for closer contact with the audience because, while the picture-framed proscenium had been abolished, at the same time the scale of the auditorium had been increased and the stage widened. It was the sheer volume of air across which they had to communicate at the Olivier that disconcerted the actors who universally preferred the older theatres. (Mackintosh, 1993, p 67)



Are there, then, no dissenting voices against the desirability of small space Shakespeare? Peter Hall confesses that he does not like chamber Shakespeare (though subsequent to that remark in his *Diaries* he has directed in the Swan and the Cottesloe) and he admits

The wonderful thing about the plays [Shakespeare's last plays] in the Cottesloe was that there was a large enough space for the rhetorical aspect to take wing...but it was intimate enough for the actors to be able to speak very quietly sometimes, so there was an extraordinary dynamic range. That can't be so in the Olivier but there are other compensations and I think *The Winter's Tale* is actually better in the Olivier. (Cook, 1989, p 20)

Michael Attenborough contends that a small space inhibits the language. He says that

....the idea of a large space breeds worries in the directors' heads to do with (at its extreme) rhetoric and declaiming and playing out front, not relating to your fellow actor and losing truth...All these are dangers. But it doesn't automatically follow that a play's truth is lost through size, particularly in relation to classical work. There is a scale to the language, which if you underpitch, in my view, you leave the actor stranded in a no man's

land of apparent naturalism...intimacy of space can often prevent an actor rising to the language. (Mulryne and Shrewring: 1995,p 90)

Peter Hall (*Diaries*,1983,p,314) had been of the opinion that a small space solved the problem of rhetoric for a modern audience and Attenborough's opinion that in a small space an actor underpitches is not tenable. A performance that is quietly spoken need not necessarily lack intensity of tone - quietness can also be as dynamic as loudness, sometimes more so. Often the most emotional moments in life are the quietest, and so, on the stage, an actor does not have to shout to convey emotion. Actors can easily shift up to a higher plane without being louder. In Bill Alexander's production of *Cymbeline* (1987) in The Other Place, Nicholas Farell spoke Posthumus's tirade against women quite quietly, though louder than the preceding dialogue, and was no less moving that he would have been had he been declaiming in a larger theatre. In Shakespeare, the language conveys the emotion, and the emotion is sustained by the rhythm. In teaching both children and adults to speak Shakespeare's verse, the present writer has found that if you train the student to sustain the rhythm the sense emerges and once that has emerged the emotion can be intensified. The rhetoric is there, but it need not be noisy.

As Donellan says, institutional buildings militate against rawness which is part of theatrical life and he thinks that theatre thrives on impermanence which is another argument for a small or a found space. For a small space is intimate and warm, on a scale that we are used to. As has been seen, Donellan thinks that the Swan needs no scenery - it is best left alone. Indeed, the problems facing a designer on a thrust stage are



totally different from those needed in a proscenium arch or open stage. As Ian Macintosh points out, thrust stages are a case by themselves

The stages at Chichester, Sheffield [The Crucible] and the Royal Exchange [Manchester] were all originally intended to limit the designer. At Stratford-upon-Avon's Swan Theatre, the management deliberately omitted any sort of scenic get-in door in the fond but doomed idea that thereby they could ban scenery from the Swan. (Mackintosh, 1993, p 99)

Besides limited facilities for getting scenery in and out, generally small space theatres have no flies to fly scenery in and out nor, often, any middle-air space. The Swan does have rafters from which pieces of scenery can be suspended. In *Two Noble Kinsmen* (1986) the prisoners' jail was a cage suspended from above, while in *The Jew of Malta* (1987), John Carlisle as Macheval was lowered on a steel bar from the balcony thus using the middle space. Scenery has to be sparse, though some scenery can be brought on on a trolley from the back, as is done in *Henry VIII* (1997). It is possible to create an inner space as Deborah Warner did in *Richard II* (at the Cottesloe) by using curtains, or as she did in *King John* and Sam Mendes did in *Troilus and Cressida* by using ladders. Robert Smallwood considers this a fine example of how to design for the Swan, saying

...Anthony Ward gave it precisely the set that the space requires, simple, unfussy, and evocative. Tilted far upstage lay a huge stone-coloured Grecian mask, cracked

across, unsulliedly beautiful on one side, pitted and corrupt on the other. A simple playing area in front of it, divided by angled ladder-like bars across the stage which were used to suggest the entrance to a tent or to Pandarus's house, seemed infinitely adaptable to Greek, Trojan, or battlefield locations. (Jackson and Smallwood ,1993,p 15)

Writing of Deborah Warner's production of *Titus Andronicus* Smallwood again praises the simplicity of the set and the way Warner had used the whole theatre saying that

The utter simplicity of the set, the eclectic suggestiveness of the costume, the insistence on the audience's participation in the play's events and contamination by its horrors through the production's success in sharing with us the whole Swan building - these things gave the play a level of seriousness and relevance that few critics had previously accorded it. (Jackson and Smallwood,1993 p 17)

Here, I submit, Smallwood sums up what a small space production is about - simplicity in production values, involving the audience, being serious about your intent, by telling the story, adhering to the text. The Swan is a thrust stage where the scenery, if any, has to be kept to the back of it. The same is true of a courtyard space. Scenery cannot be placed in the centre of the stage otherwise many members of the audience would not be able to see the action. Even with pieces of furniture placed mid- stage, some of the audience can



only see the actor's back - though, of course, backs can be eloquent. David Thacker in his production of *Coriolanus* (1995) made a virtue of this by placing Toby Stephens downstage centre in a chair with his back to the main part of the audience during the Senate scene. For the audience at the sides, Stephens's front was, of course, visible. But the way Stephens sat, even for those who could not see his face, fully conveyed his emotions. This production was a splendid example of how to involve the whole audience. The galleries were festooned with banners proclaiming *Liberté Egalité, Fraternité*, (the period was French Revolution) and the mob spoke from the balconies shouting down to the characters on the stage. Larger thrust stage houses solve the problem by having scenery at the back, or, at Stratford, Ontario, by having a permanent set which is decorated. Again, in both these spaces, because of the audiences at the sides no centre stage scenery or back-drop can be used. Certainly, whatever the size of the space, simplicity of design can be effective, as the White Box productions show. But designers often like to make a grand gesture on a big stage, thinking it necessary to do this to enhance the play. In the 1996/7 production of *Troilus and Cressida* John Gunter, the designer, eschewed the simplicity of the Anthony Ward design, and built a solid structure, which in turn represented battlements, Pandarus's house, and Cressida's abode in the Greek camp. These walls went diagonally across the stage, and moved back and forth. In a previous production of the same play (directed by Howard Davies: designed by Ralph Koltai) the setting was a derelict mansion, with a sweeping staircase. This was far away from the simplicity and elegance of the Ward design, and the Leslie Hurry design, (referred to in Chapter Two) of the sandpit against a cyclorama. As *You Like It* is a play that could cause difficulties in a small space - just how to deal with the forest. On a main house stage the designer can build a whole forest of trees as Farrah did in 1980, though Nick Omerod's

elegant structure (for Cheek by Jowl, see under) of beige backcloths, steel struts to support them, and ribbons evoked a magical forest without recourse to trees. In 1981/2, John Gunter built a glass and metal structure for *All's Well That Ends Well* which stylishly, by turns, suggests the conservatory of a court, a railway station, and a country house. Contrasted with this is the 1992 production in the Swan where a silver construction at the back was divided into squares which opened to reveal a model of the place where the action was taking place. Theatres in the round are even more restricted in the amount of scenery used. At the Young Vic platforms are sometimes built in the gangways to give a wider variety of space for the action, but if the oval shape is used all that a designer can do is use furniture and other small props to evoke atmosphere.

The Main House at Stratford and the Barbican both have shallow apron stages, but, because of the walls at each side the effect is of an apron coming through a proscenium arch, and so designers tend to treat these stages as picture-frame, and the theatres do have flies, and other mechanical devices. They are, therefore, capable of elaborate scene changes: of being able to fly both scenery and people in and out: having a stage device that lifts part of the scenery none of which are available at the Young Vic, The Swan or The Other Place. Productions in small spaces have smaller budgets than main house productions though as Russell Jackson points out, besides economics the position of the play in the repertory can also affect what the designer can do. He writes

Sometimes the designer's scope has been limited by lack of spaces to store and manoeuvre settings: this is especially likely to happen at the end of the



season, so that the designer of the 'last show in ' can find storage space and flying lines and lighting positions in short supply. (Smallwood and Jackson, 1988, p 2)

which, of course, can also apply to the small spaces when running in repertoire, though some small spaces just have one production at a time thus obviating that problem. As Jackson further points out sometimes the nature of the designs can be affected by considerations of budget or organisation which have nothing to do with aesthetic or interpretative decisions.

What is needed scenographically in small spaces is the ability to evoke the atmosphere of the play but still keep the scenery on a human scale, whereas on a large stage the scenery can be heroic. Because there was no scenery on the Elizabethan stage, the playwrights tell the audience where the scene takes place and this is, generally, sufficient for an audience. A few banners to suggest a change of court, the sound of wind and the actors wearing cloaks or coats, to say that the action has moved out-of-doors, the appearance of weapons to denote a battle, flowers and corn in buckets to represent a harvest festival, these are all devices that have been used effectively in the productions discussed under to denote changes of scene, imaginatively, inventively and on a human scale.

Costumes, though, have to be more detailed than on a main stage as the back is seen as well as the front. On a main stage the designer can get away with not decorating the back of a skirt or a jacket but cannot do this on a thrust or courtyard stage. The costume has to be conceived in the round, as it were. The same with props - any book that a character holds must be in

keeping with the play and the period in which it is set. For example, in a production of *Hamlet* in Elizabethan costume it would be inappropriate for Hamlet to be reading from a Penguin edition of Montaigne: though the title would be appropriate, the edition would not. In Trevor Nunn's production of *Measure for Measure* Lucio and his friends were reading *Die Reformer* which helped to set the period as Freud's Vienna. Perdita's and Ophelia's flowers have to be accurate on a small stage, whereas in a large theatre almost any flowers would do.

As has been said, budgets affect what is possible. When The Other Place was opened the budgets were set at around £200, and £250 was spent (mainly on costumes) for the Trevor Nunn/Ian McKellen *Macbeth*. Nowadays, The Other Place is used to launch the RSC's small scale tour and the budget is approaching £20,000 (Conversation with Peter Whelan, 1993) which allows for a simple one scene set, and good costumes that are well-made and stand up to touring. Cheek by Jowl capitalize at around £20,000 also and the Young Vic would consider going up to £30,000 on occasion (see Appendix 5) though both these companies have resident directors and so no directorial fee is involved.

Of course, not all productions that start in small spaces remain in them for they can tour or be transferred into other spaces, which can be larger or smaller. Declan Donellan's *As You Like It* was conceived as a large space production but played also in small spaces. Actors are used to adapting to different spaces and, using their considerable technique, expand or trim their performances to match the space. As Roger Allam says

The Swan is an actor-friendly space which



simply requires less hard grind and effort. At the Barbican you can't just turn your back and still include some of the audience in the same way. (*The Independent* 10th July 1991)

The director realizes that when a play transfers into a larger space the style will broaden and some of the detail and subtlety will be lost. For example, in *3 Henry VI* the roses worn by the opposing forces had to be supplemented by banners when playing in large theatres but as Terry Hands said in *The Independent*, 10th July 1991 a change of theatre allows the actors to refocus and redefine, and that it was important for them to redefine the actor/audience relationship. He went on to say that

In the Swan there is almost equal sharing between audience and actor - the actors have to play out to walls of people. It's like a dovecot with all those cubicles filled with 400 audience heads. You need little scenery because the audience is most of it, the building itself is the rest.

He also says (same source) that the thrust and courtyard stages allow a directness with the audience which is harder to achieve on the Barbican (or proscenium arch stage) where the danger is that the action, the actors and the design can spread too wide and everything seems to disappear.

Difference of dynamics and refocusing can also alter performances of a production that starts in a larger

space and then moves to an even smaller one. Even though *Troilus and Cressida* started in the comparatively small Swan it moved into the even smaller space of The Pit in London. Writing in *Plays International*, July 1991, Neil Taylor said

The transition...has inevitably altered the dynamics of the performance in relation to the audience, and, in the case of the battle scenes at least, the alteration is beneficial: the open studio space and the closeness of the audience make them both more spectacular and more involving...Nothing in terms of spirit or detail seems to have been lost in the move.

But it is the designer and the stage management staff who have the greatest responsibility when a small space production is put into a larger theatre or vice versa. Jason Barnes, the Production Manager of the Cottesloe Theatre says that it is important to match the layout of the Cottesloe in the receiving theatre. Another obstacle can be the size of the stage in the receiving place

The depth in a West End theatre is typically 24 feet or 27 feet; in the Cottesloe we have a minimum of 30 feet and often 36 feet...The productions do transfer to bigger theatres. We are clearly not going to take a production to a 2500 seat auditorium. It is just too big. Vocally, although in the Cottesloe you have to keep the text up or else it



gets lost, it is well heard, and to translate a play conceived in a space like that to a bad acoustic is unacceptable. (Mulryne and Shewring, 1995, 101/2)

Roger Chapman who is Head of Touring at the Royal National Theatre concedes, in the same feature, that what is the hardest quality to get when touring from the Cottesloe is to create a similar atmosphere but says that most directors think that the result is sub-standard and that Barnes's contention that small scale productions work better in found spaces is probably correct.

One play that went to many venues was David Thacker's production for the RSC of *Two Gentlemen of Verona* which, initially was at the Swan. Thacker decided to set it in the 1930s and to have the songs of the period and on stage was what Charles Spencer of the *Daily Telegraph* (19th April, 1991) called a 'nifty little band' with a singer. The band was situated at the back of the stage in what was variously called by the press a bandstand, a summerhouse or a gazebo which was decorated with almond/cherry/apple blossom (Design by Sheelagh Keegan). The singer (Hilary Cromie) was on stage as the audience entered singing Gershwin, Berlin, Cole Porter, and Ray Noble. The effect was like entering a cabaret. The production went to the Playhouse, Newcastle and then to the main stage at the Barbican. The setting was maintained - the bandstand was at the back of the theatre and the top of it was used as a balcony. The rest of the scenery, being mostly garden furniture was also the same. After a break, it was decided to re-cast the production and send it out on tour to such diverse places as Chichester, Darlington Civic Centre, a Frank Matcham theatre (Richmond, Surrey), the

eighteenth-century theatre at Bath, and the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, London (17th December, 1993). The tour ended in April 1994. It is difficult to judge whether the same atmosphere was maintained as most of the provincial criticism centred on the brilliance of the dog Crab, played by Woolly, but Charles Awdry of the Ealing Gazette did remark that the production had 'the air of a revue' which suggests that the playing had opened out from the atmosphere of a cabaret. Like *The Blue Angel* the unique intimacy created in the small space had been lost.

This chapter has considered the differences that a director and designer have to face when planning a small space production from those that are prevalent in a main house production, and the calculations that have to be made when touring or transferring small space productions. What directors and actors say, it seems, is that the peculiar intimacy that a small space provides is dissipated when the production is removed to the larger space, but can be intensified when moved to a even smaller space. The audience/actor relationship is altered. Buzz Goodbody, according to Hugh Pearman in *The Sunday Times* 14th July, 1991 said of the original *The Other Place* that in it the play not the place was the thing, and further on in the feature he says that Michael Reardon defines the three houses at Stratford thus

...the Memorial Theatre, with its proscenium arch, is a place where the audience is dominant and the actors intrude: at the Swan, actors and audience are on an equal footing: and at *The Other Place* the actors are in charge and it is they who invite the audience in.



## SECTION TWO

### THE PRODUCTIONS

'A PERFECT MINIATURE BLOWN  
UP LARGE LOOSES BOTH DETAIL  
AND PERFECTION' Terry Hands

*The Independent*

10th July 1991



# THE SWAN THEATRE, STRATFORD-upon-AVON

Acting Area: 13 metres by 7 metres

Capacity: circa 500



Photograph: Alastair Carew-Cox



# TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

THE SWAN THEATRE, STRATFORD-upon-AVON

Summer and Autumn 1990

Followed by a season in THE PIT, The Barbican London,  
1991.

DIRECTOR	Sam Mendes
DESIGNER	Anthony Ward
TROILUS	Ralph Fiennes
CRESSIDA	Amanda Root
THERSITES	Simon Russell Beale

Shakespeare wrote three plays where the title is shared by an eponymous hero and heroine. In *Romeo and Juliet* the story is firmly focused on the young lovers, the politics taking a minor part: in *Anthony and Cleopatra* the story of the lovers shape the political events, while in *Troilus and Cressida*, the politics form the main body of the play, the lovers, a minor though interesting part. *Troilus and Cressida* is concerned with two different philosophies, two different ways of looking at life. As Jonathan Dollimore says

*Troilus and Cressida* has two prolonged

philosophical debates, one in the Greek camp, primarily on order, the other in the Trojan camp, primarily on value. The main speech in each debate (by Ulysses and Hector respectively) embraces natural law and parallels quite closely passages from Hooker's *Laws*. Ulysses' famous 'degree' speech concentrates on hierarchial order in the universe and in human society: 'degree, priority and place.../in all line of order' (1.iii.86 and 88). Without order 'That by a pace goes backward, with a purpose/It hath to climb' (1.iii.128-9). Hector, in affirming the existence of 'moral laws/Of nature and of nations' (11.ii.184-5) captures the other essential tenet of natural law: human law, derives from the pre-existent laws of nature; human kind discovers rather than makes social law. (Dollimore, 1984, pp 42/3)

As Dollimore also points out, there is also another theme which suggests that 'in Nature itself there is something which runs counter to the teleological harmony and integration of natural law' which is being dislocated. This dislocation of society is, I submit, a main theme of the play, in which two societies, thinking themselves both just and stable, find themselves disintegrating through causes (Achilles's reluctance to accept his position as an heroic warrior and Paris's reluctance to give up his paramour, Helen) which, on the surface seem trivial, but which represent the rottenness within their respective societies. The Greeks rely too much on political and military order, the Trojans on value and form. This is brought out in the two central debates which should be of paramount



consideration for the director. In this political disintegration the story of Troilus and Cressida is an interesting facet, but not one that instigates any real action to the main political theme. They are passive figures politically, who suffer through the political situation, but do not, cannot, control it. But their story is important to the plot, showing how war and politics affect young lives. Two other characters Pandarus and Thersites, act as symbols of, and commentators on, the disintegration. These two create much of the comedy in the play, and have to be cast with strong actors who can communicate with the audience in a lively and direct way. It can be argued that a small space theatre is a more viable place to do this than when the actor has to energize the space from a proscenium arch or even an apron stage.

For this is another curious aspect of this play: although it seems to be a tragedy, it does not end with its eponymous characters being killed, and it contains a large element of humour. A humour that is cynical and satiric, that with the laughter it inspires brings bile and distaste. Unlike Shakespeare's other love stories that of Troilus and Cressida is sordid and unromantic, sexual rather than sensual. It has elements of disillusion, dishonour but, however, it is most passionate and contains some of Shakespeare's most visceral verse, as in Troilus's speech

I am giddy. Expectation whirl me round.  
 Th'imaginary relish is so sweet  
 That it enchants my sense. What will it be  
 When the wat'ry palate tasted indeed  
 Love's thrice reputed nectar? Death, I fear me  
 Swooning destruction, or some joy too fine,  
 Too-subtle-potent, tuned too sharp in sweetness  
 For the capacity of my ruder powers.  
 I fear it much, and I do fear besides

That I shall lose distinctions in my joys,  
 As doth a battle when they charge on heaps  
 The enemy flying. (Act 2: scene ii)

Though, as Dollimore points out, this is a play where  
 misfortune brutalises Troilus

He must depend for his identity and  
 survival not on stoic inner virtue, but,  
 quite simply, on his society. (Dollimore,  
 1984,p 41)

But that society treats people as commodities, and  
 because of that is disintegrating. Cressida, herself,  
 a child of that society, shows what happens when value  
 takes place of honour, when, instead of protecting her,  
 Troilus lets her go to the Greek camp, without  
 argument. The Greeks, on the other hand, show what  
 happens when honour is replaced by revenge. All these  
 elements, which the director has to bear in mind, are  
 set against the background of a war started for shabby  
 aims and which causes shabby actions. Valerie Traub  
 sees this as a play where

Questions of nationalist and erotic  
 identity then, are consistently  
 intertwined: it is those "merry Greeks",  
 after all, defined as morally and  
 sexually loose, who seek to penetrate  
 the walls of a Troy also already defined  
 via Paris' abduction of Helen as sexually  
 licentious. Much in the play contributes  
 to a linking of war and sexuality.  
 (Traub,1992, p 72)



The sexuality is not only heterosexual, the play also represents homo-eroticism in the characters of Achilles and Patroclus, though this is treated more satirically than seriously, these scenes add their own dark note. They contribute to the scepticism and irony of the play. As Nigel Grene says there is

...a withholding of poetic faith , the refusal to suspend disbelief (which) belong with a scepticism very differently valued in plays found upon belief and those found on irony. (Grene, 1992, p 283)

?

So, then, are we expected to treat all these suggested themes as ironical? Is the message of the play not to take ourselves too seriously, for Fate will always find a way of tricking us? Or should we take charge of our own destiny?

The story, of course, was not a new one. It was, indeed, one of the most famous of stories. Chaucer had written his version *Troilus and Criseyde* and Robert Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* could have been read by Shakespeare, who would have known the Achilles's story from Homer, perhaps in Chapman's version. He could, also, have got elements of the stories from Virgil and Ovid (for full discussion of sources see Arden Edition, 1991, p 23 onwards). There are differences in detail from these sources, and Shakespeare does not tell us the ultimate fate of his lovers. What distinguishes this play, however, is not the stories it is telling, but its bitter and stinging wit. This wit is mainly conveyed by Pandarus and, more especially, by Thersites, who both should be able to communicate with the audience, drawing it into the action.

Pandarus, at first, a debonair man, who delights in arranging the liaison, turns into a bitter and diseased old man. Throughout the play he comments on those around him with amusement and wit as we see from the very first when Cressida questions him about the Trojan warriors. His praise of Troilus and the way he draws Cressida into approval of him is done with a witty delicacy. The main wit of the play, however, is in the speeches of Thersites, which are funny and corroding, bitter and witty. Simon Russell Beale, in the production under discussion, saw Thersites as a licensed fool: Achilles calls him 'a privileged man and, although Russell Beale said that he had no real understanding of what that actually meant, and what position in society Thersites might have had, he and the director, Sam Mendes, decided to meet the jester cliché head on.

I decided to use a conventional joker's stick - with bells and all - and it came to serve as a reminder to Thersites of a rôle that he hates but pays the rent. The more conventionally jolly the stick, we thought, the more painful the reminder to someone as intelligent and cynical as Thersites of his position as an entertainer and his exclusion from the circle of protagonists. (Jackson and Smallwood, 1993, pp 162/3)

As a fool, Thersites can make bitter comments about the so-called heroes and he can complain to the audience about them. His rant on Ajax is typical of his corruscating wit



Why a stalks up and down like a peacock,  
 a stride and a stand; ruminates like an  
 hostess that hath no arithmetic but her  
 brain to set down her recknoning; bites  
 his lip with politic regard, as who  
 should say There were wit in this head,  
 and 'Twould out ' - and so there is; but  
 it lies coldly in him as fire in a flint,  
 which will not show without knocking.

(Act 3:iii)

This gives the actor a fine opportunity to make accomplices of the audience. Russell Beale's interpretation, too, gave Thersites a place in the heirarchy which made him seem ill at ease, not quite knowing where he is placed in that society.

Unusually, too, Shakespeare lets his characters sneer about women. In most of his plays he treats women very fairly and has compassion for their state in a patriarchal society. He has sympathy, for example with Hermia, Hermione, Juliet and Ophelia, while his comedy heroines are both outspoken and radiant. In *Troilus and Cressida* he shows women as objects, powerless and in a state of dependency. Helen is a commodity to the Trojans as is clearly shown in the debate scene. Cressida, to, becomes a commodity, told to go to the Greeks, without being able to appeal. As Jan Kott says

Helen is a whore, but Helen has been abducted with Priam's permission and that of the Trojan leaders. Helen's cause has become Troy's cause...Helen will become a whore only when the Trojans return her to Menelaus and admit

themselves that she is a whore, not worth dying for. How much is a jewel worth?  
(Kott,1988,p 63)

As Juliet Stevenson, herself a notable Cressida, pointed out in the 1985 RSC programme,

The myth of war being fought for Helen is punctured by the Trojans themselves as they talk about her - in fact, they say she's a tired old whore. The war's being fought for the honour of Menelaus: it's a very male cause. If she had been someone else's wife, there'd have been no war.

Cressida has no support from her menfolk. She is cruelly called 'a daughter of the game' but she has very little option. Her uncle procures her for Troilus giving her no protection, and, in the Greek camp, her father does not restrain the Greeks, so she couples with Diomedes to get some protection, not, though, without regret for Troilus. She is a victim of war, and though she is certainly sexually aware she might not have acted as she does if she had been supported by both Troilus and her father, Calchas. No wonder she is feckless and cynical. Troilus is anything but heroic. He seems unable to do his own wooing: he lets his girl be sent to the Greek camp without protesting, and, spying on her, quickly condemns her without hearing her explanation - altogether reprehensible behaviour.

The other element which hangs over the play like an unsavoury miasma is disease. In no other play does Shakespeare evoke and refer to illness so continually.



TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

SWAN THEATRE, 1990: Set by Anthony Ward



courtesy of The Shakespeare Centre

As Valerie Traub puts it

"Diseases" is the final word of *Troilus and Cressida*, and metaphors of disease are invoked to describe all the major problems in the play, from Nestor's comment that "all our power is sick"(1.iii.139); to the "infection" of "plaguy" self-pride charged against Achilles and Ajax (1.iii.187:2.iii.176) and the "envious fever" of emulation that spreads throughout the Grecian camp; to Troilus' characterization of his love for Cressida as "the open ulcer of my heart" (1.i.55) (Traub,1992,p 73)

Thersites's speeches, too, are full of diseased talk, one disease piles upon another to make stunning invective - palsies, dirt, wheezing, pus, aches and pains are among his common currency. The prevailing metaphors of the play deal with medical terms, not only in the comedy, but in the very heart of the story, and when the city of Troy, itself, is penetrated and destroyed. It is a play about dishonour, licentiousness, and the cynical disregard of persons, particularly women, who throughout are treated as commodities. For the director the problems are that he has to make the distasteful acceptable in the theatre, to draw what sympathy he can for the victims in the piece, and to represent a cynical war as an acceptable and exciting piece of theatre. In dealing with the piece in a small space, he has the advantage of the close and almost tactile intimacy that is available, combined with the difficulty of representing debate scenes vividly, and battle scenes excitingly, differentiating between the opposing forces, and their camps. Sam Mendes's production of this play was



performed in the Swan Theatre.

This theatre bears a resemblance to an Elizabethan theatre in that it has a stage (28 feet long) which thrusts into the audience which sits both in front of it and at the sides. It is not so wide as what is presumed to be the width of the Globe, but it has much of the intimacy that must have occurred in that theatre. One difference from an Elizabethan theatre is that there are gangways between the downstairs seats through which the actors can enter and exit. There are two balconies above and these, too, can be used for actors to abseil down, or to speak from. In addition, there is a balcony on each side of the stage and at the back which helps to form a recess there. The gangways round the theatre are wide and can be used for fights or for a running entrance or exit (pursued by a bear, perhaps). A trap-door is also available down-stage. Sam Mendes made full use of all these advantages, saying that the Swan

...allows you to achieve the fluid and simple technique of shifting from one world to another, to be both epic and domestic. So it's the ideal theatre in which one can move from the inside of a tent on to the battle plains of Troy, and then back into a man's mind...

...With these entrances way upstage and also the entrances through the audience, it meant that the world could exist in opposition to the audience, and yet could also be a debating chamber, a place in which the audience is implicated in the action. (*Shakespeare Survey 1994*: p 121)

The designer, Anthony Ward, as has been said before hung a metallic mask of Apollo on the back wall, reaching almost to the ceiling. This was lit with various colours throughout the action - gold when the Trojans seemed victorious: red for the battle scenes: and a sombre lead-like colour for the more tragic scenes. It had an eloquence. In front of this were large ladders which gave the impression of scaling ladders. An almost transparent white curtain could be drawn across the whole of the back area, which allowed a mass entry of soldiers to be discovered which could then march in line down stage, which Mendes thought helped to 'energize the space'. The trapdoor was open for part of the action and filled with water. In this Pandarus and Cressida dangled their feet when talking; the Greek warriors ritually washed their weapons in it, while Cressida and Pandarus gazed and talked about them on the upstage balcony. The pool was closed for the council scenes and during the battle scenes. This pool, Mendes thought

...became something metaphorical and imagistic, having been something naturalistic. It was just what the audience wanted it to be. (*Shakespeare Survey 1994* p 122)

Sam Mendes made use of the entries through the audience by making his players walk diagonally from one corner of the stage, across it, and exit through the audience. He used both sides of the stage for this and then, also, reversed the diagonal, that is from audience to back stage. He used all levels - for the battle scenes, the older generals watched the fighting from the stage balconies, while Thersites hung on the ladders. He escaped from Ajax, too, by scaling a ladder. Mendes



gave a fine sweep to the action by using all layers of the theatre, and it helped the transition from one side to the other, as one set of actors moved downstage, so another was able to take the stage from another point. As Charles Spencer wrote in the *Daily Telegraph*, 28th April 1990, "The action is staged on a bare, wooden stage..." while Paul Taylor, two days afterwards in the *Independent* commented that the real star of the evening was the Swan itself, "with its sheer stacked-up galleries and debating-hall feel, the Swan is the perfect venue for a play which offers colliding perspectives on the action. Mendes makes brilliant use of the place". He was aided in his lighting (Geraint Pugh) which used colour to suggest the mood of a scene, but , mostly had the hard, bright light found in middle-eastern countries. The domestic scenes were more softly lit, while strong backlighting from underneath the gallery put faces into shadow, which was very dramatic in the night scenes. For the meeting between Diomedes and Cressida, Mendes placed the couple downstage, the only illumination (seemingly) was from Diomedes's lamp, though Troilus's face, back stage, under the ladders, must also have had a soft light on it. The music was one of the effects that distinguished Greeks from Trojans: it was sensuous for Troy, more strident for the Greeks. But what made for effect, and is only possible in a small space was the intimate sounds - the jangle of bracelets, the clash of swords, the creak of leather. Costumes were eclectic. Stylish greatcoats, uniforms, greek chitons, blazers, breastplates, were all mixed so that Benedict Nightingale (*The Times*, 27th April, 1990) remarked "The soldiers seem to be fighting at Marathon, Agincourt and the Somme"

Mendes did not seem very interested by the lovers - a lack-lustre Ralph Fiennes (later replaced by Paterson Joseph) and Amanda Root who flounced around the stage. But the political debates were strongly staged, again,

using the thrust stage well. The chief speaker, at any one time, was always well placed up stage, so that he could address both the audience on stage and the audience proper. In the Trojan debate, for example, Priam was up stage, while the Princes were at each corner of the stage and moved forward as they spoke. For the Greek council scene, two tables were brought and placed on the stage, the warriors being behind it. In both these scenes the verse-speaking was exceptionally clear and the complicated thoughts very clearly explained, not only to the fellow actors, but to the audience who were drawn into the arguments. Helen's entrance was most effective, the more particularly as it was on a small stage. Martin Hoyles in the *Financial Times*, 28th April, 1990) said that "The play has never been so clear-textured without losing its complexity...(it was) immaculately delivered" Benedict Nightingale pointed out that

A theatrical debating chamber, which the Swan resembles, seems suited to what may be the most intellectually intricate of Shakespeare's plays. And if the Bard could trust Jacobean lawyers to imagine Trojan battlefields, there is no reason why we should fail to do so today. (*The Times*: 27th April, 1990)

In the Main House production 1996/7 this advantage of the Swan's atmosphere was, of course, lost and the debates, instead of involving the audience reverted to being staged debates, which was also the case of the 1985/6 production. The debates in the National Theatre production (Elijah Moshinsky) at the Young Vic in 1976, however, failed, according to Michael Billington



[to] use the intimacy of the small auditorium to focus on the language...The Young Vic's environment is not excitingly used. (*The Guardian*: 18th June, 1976)

This play, as has been said, shows the helplessness of women to resist the position in which men please to place them. Shakespeare showed many sides of their predicament, which Mendes and his cast portrayed. Cassandra (Linda Kerr Scott) was a bedraggled creature with whom the men were quietly bored in a way that would have been too understated to register in a large space, while Sally Dexter's entrance as Helen was a striking piece of production. Suffused with a red light, she was born on a litter, completely wrapped up in gold cloth, which was slowly unwound by attendants, which as the audience had a rounded view of her, was something that could not have been produced in a main house theatre, and which seemed to underline the thought that she was a commodity to the Trojans. It was a stunning metaphor for a prized possession - again the men were too enmeshed in their own feelings to consider hers. She was a symbol, a cipher, and this was more greatly felt as she was exposed on that bare stage.

The casting of Simon Russell Beale, with his facility to involve an audience, as Thersites was one of the elements which made this production so exciting. Entering through the audience, his mutterings growing into speech he played to them with consummate skill. He walked round the stage, addressing first this part of the audience, then crossing the stage, talked to another section, and at the same seeming to include another part. It was not quite like a stand-up comic because he was always in character. He allowed Thersites to display his love of language, but he was always in control of it. (For Russell Beale's own assessment of

the character , see Jackson and Smallwood, 1993, p 160 onwards). Russell Beale really pulled the audience into the play making his comments become their comments. This was possible because of the close proximity of the audience, who responded with delighted laughter. Most of the critics praised this performance, which had the advantage of this close contact which was unavailable to Richard Macabe, the 1996/7 Thersites.

If war is the proper business of man, then the conflicts in the play were excitingly presented. Not only the conflict in debate, as we have seen, but the conflict between characters. Here the Greeks were shown to be the most individual, and the rows between them resounded throughout the theatre, especially those between Ajax and Thersites. The thrashing that Ajax gave him was really brutal, and several times Thersites escaped him by scaling a ladder. The battle scenes were adroitly handled (Fight Director: Terry King). There was a great deal of noise, not just from the stage as it would be in the Main House, but sounding all round the theatre, and, in addition, there was a great howling wind which seemed, again, to be surrounding the audience. Drum beats clashed and soldiers climbed up and down the ladders and seemed to almost topple into the audience's lap. The old men in the cast watched from the up stage balconies. The whole theatre seemed to fill with smoke and fighting men. In the scene when Hector is finally killed, the soldiers entered from up stage through the ladders to menace, and finally, ritually kill Hector, Achilles giving the final, fatal blow, the old men seemed to freeze and Thersites, clinging to a ladder looked on in great, sexual excitement. What made it so exciting was that, as Paul Taylor commented

...the sightlines of these spectators



never cross - a graphically paradoxical way of showing how their perceptions of events crunchingly conflict. (*The Independent*: 28th April, 1990)

Pandarus (Norman Rodway) spoke the final words of the play, looking pox-ridden and sick unto death, his dapperness gone, very quietly down stage, speaking to the audience in a very intimate manner, including everyone both at ground level and in the balconies in his thoughts.

*Troilus and Cressida* is a cynical play which penetrates the disgraceful acts and trivial causes of wars. On the surface it is disgusting in the way that it almost revels in disease, discontent and the way it despises people. But behind this disgust there is a real sense that war is being shown not as an heroic event, but as a sham. This aspect was well achieved by Mendes who respected the text, made his actors speak it well with clarity and understanding. As Charles Spencer reported

Shakespeare's language here is particularly dense, but is delivered with a clarity which makes light of most of the difficulties. (*Daily Telegraph*: 28th April 1990)

Mendes treated the text with respect, something he would have done in any theatre, but because he could allow his actors to speak in a conversational tone the text seemed to be clearer and, even, luminous. The chief asset of this production was the use of the space. There was a definite interaction between audience and

actors, especially in the playing of Thersites and, to a lesser degree, but none the less potent, with Norman Rodway's delighting Pandarus. And the battle scenes used the whole theatre, and the audience, because of the nearness of the actors, and the eclectic nature of the costumes, were not only in the theatre, but at Troy, at Agincourt, the Somme, and in the desert with Montgomery and the Eighth Army. Shakespeare's indictment of war, using Troy as a metaphor, was keenly and sharply felt by all present. Both intellect and emotion went hand-in-hand and the Swan was allowed to speak for itself and was shown to be an extraordinary place in which complex and absorbing themes can engross and involve actors and audience together. As has been said before, several critics said the Swan was the real star of the evening.



# TIMON OF ATHENS

THE YOUNG VIC THEATRE, THE CUT, LONDON.

28th February to 20th April 1991

DIRECTOR	Trevor Nunn
DESIGNERS	John Gunther (scenery) Adreane Neofitou (costumes)
TIMON	David Suchet
APEMENTUS	Barry Foster

*Timon of Athens* is, arguably, Shakespeare's least theatrical play: that is, it has very little of the kind of dramatic incidents which form most of Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy. There are no battles on stage, no duels, falling in and out of love, spying, plotting, secret killings, murder, madness or deaths - nor does its eponymous hero have the fascination of the other tragic heroes. So uncharacteristic is this work of its age and its author that doubt has been expressed about whom wrote it. Modern scholarship seems to favour the idea that Shakespeare worked on this play with Thomas Middleton (for full discussion of this point see Arden edition, 1991 pp xxii/xl and Wells, 1994 p 280). The play was included, though, in the First Folio by Heminges and Condell, and that has to be respected. Muriel Bradbrook says of the play that, in

her view,

[*Timon*] cannot be called a play in the ordinary sense, but it alternates between very mordant comedy satirizing the city sharks who surround Timon and great cosmic dreams where he exiles himself from the city and returns to dig the bare earth for roots. (Bradbrook, 1980, p 209)

Nigel Grene endorses the view that satire makes up a great part in this play, saying

The play, allegoric/satiric...remains puzzling as it leaves us uncertain as to what is the point of the satire. (Grene, 1992, p 126)

Later on, Grene suggests that the satire concerns 'man's predatoriness' and he comes to the conclusion that *Timon* is a 'generic hybrid' (p. 132) where

the satiric sequence of scenes...is so devastating in its revelation of the gap between profession and practice, that we may be tempted to see irony here, too. (Grene, 1992, p 134)

Rolf Soellner thinks that the play is a cynical portrayal of man and society and that it shows the degeneracy and sickness of man, and, especially in the second half



...a violently pessimistic voice is raised and spews forth hatred and disgust, the voice of Timon the misanthrope, a man who has rudely wakened from his long dream of universal friendship and love to the reality of his destitution and his friends' villainy. (Soellner, 1979, p 4)

The construction of the play, it is contended, is in the parallel stories of Timon and Alcibiades for when Timon's life declines, Alcibiades's rises. The stories are presented like counterpoint in music, each scene in the play concerning Timon having a similar one concerning Alcibiades. Other character also have a parallel - the flattering Lords, for example, Lucius, Lucullus and Sempronius are matched by the servants Flaminius, Lucilius and Servilius, while the trusting Steward is opposed to the cynic Apemantus.

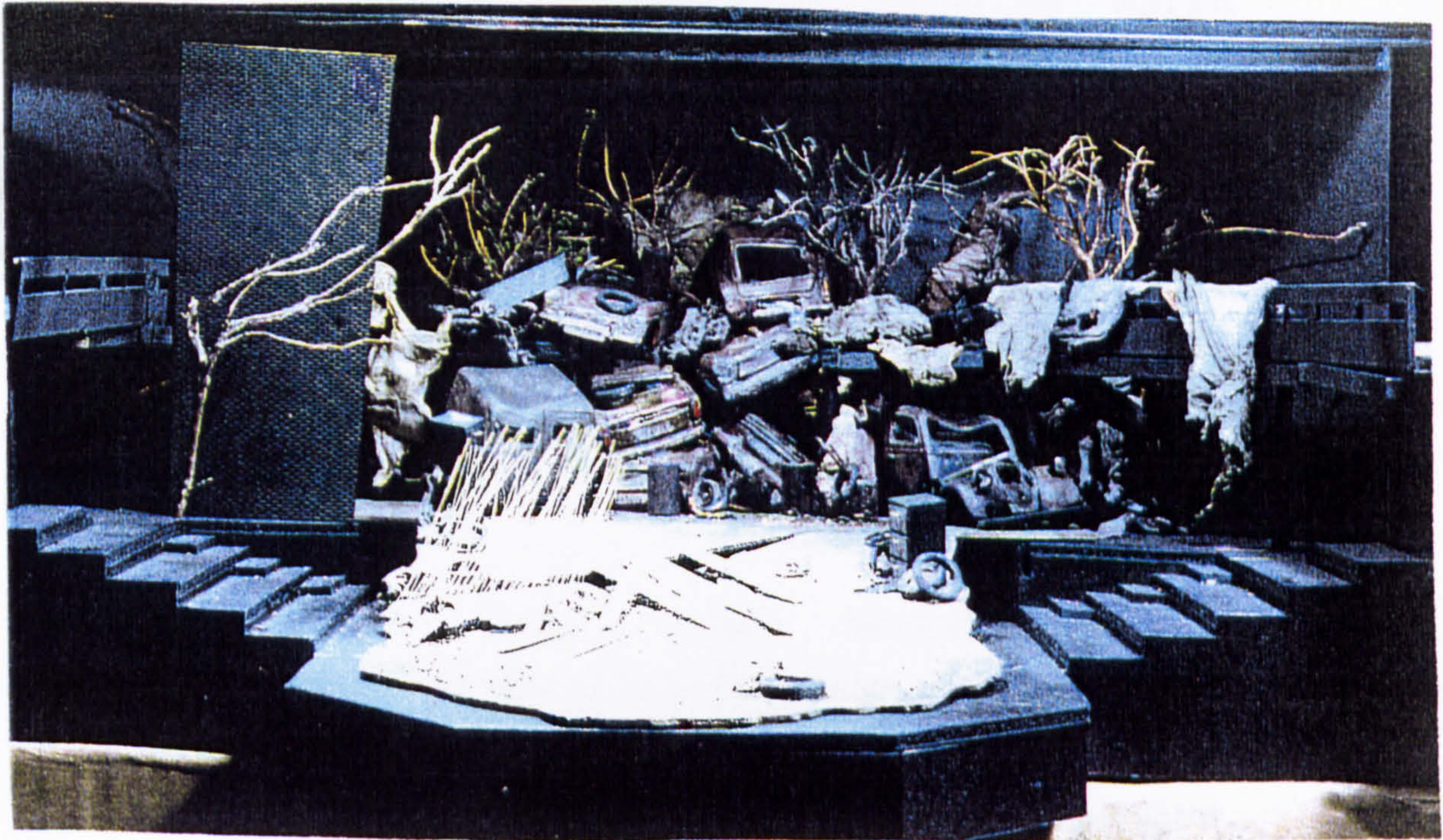
This contrast, this counterpoint, is further emphasized by parallel scenes: the opening scene with the Poet and Painter is repeated in Act 5: scene i and there are scenes with Apemantus both at the beginning and end of the play, as there is also with the Steward. The balance is evident throughout and is further underlined with the two set pieces in the play, the two banquets. The first, resplendent, a celebration with its masque and dance, is balanced with the second banquet with its symbolic and actual frugality. This counterpoint gives rhythm and a dynamic quality to the play which creates, if not dramatic tension, a harmony and a balance which has its own dramatic interest. As Nicholas Grene says

The gregariousness of the first half is



TIMON OF ATHENS

THE YOUNG VIC: Set by John Gunter



courtesy of the Young Vic



met by the isolation of the second, the absoluteness of Timon's idealism is matched by the absoluteness of his misanthropy. (Greene, 1992, p 136)

Or again

The play thus sets up within its first half a tension between an idealism, which is somehow admirable, even though it is seen to be deludes<sup>^</sup>, and its distorting mirror image in an annihilating cynicism (Greene, 1992, p 134)

Stanley Wells points out that

Nowhere else does Shakespeare so obviously incorporate into a play lines that could have stood before it as an 'argument', or a summary of its action. (Wells, 1994, p 274)

As has been said, the matter of the play is not what is generally thought of as an Elizabethan tragedy. Rather than events, it deals with abstract thought, relying on that for intellectual excitement. This follows the tradition founded by the universities, where debates were held regularly, both as a means of education as well as for entertainment. This quality is shown particularly in the dialogues between Alcibiades and the Senators (Act 3: scene v) and between Apemantus and Timon (Act 4: scene iii) and though its hero is not profound, he does express high and rare emotion in the latter part of the play.

Timon is totally different from the other tragic heroes. Although Aristotle thought that character should take second place to plot, in Shakespeare's tragedies it is the heroes's characters which provide abiding interest and fascination. From success they descend into madness or misfortune, and from there to death. But they all start as distinguished men. Timon stands apart from the other heroes. His only distinction his (precarious) riches: his only fault, if fault it be, is in trusting too much: he is not really a great man in himself, or by his deeds as the other heroes are. His status is never really defined. All that is told us is that he is counted rich, and he spends his money freely. He has a loveable nature. Nicholas Grene expresses it thus

There is that within Timon, his 'heart',  
his 'unmatched mind' which attracts love  
and admiration, even though the impulses  
of that heart and the assumptions of the  
mind prove spectacularly misguided.  
(Grene, 1992, p 134)

Nonetheless, he lacks profundity of thought, emotion taking its place. He is given to emotional excess and seems unable to live within the Aristotlean 'mean'. As Apemantus says to him

The middle of humanity thou never knewest  
but extremity at both ends (Act 4: scene  
iii)

Timon's very generosity is exaggerated: when he is disillusioned his very misanthropy is also exaggerated.



He is not a particularly sympathetic subject, less so than the other heroes, for he is imprudent, and, while he has a certain sweetness and nobility, he is blindly foolish and egotistical. Above all, he is a bad judge of men, for he trusts his friends to behave towards him as he would towards them. Although he is made to realize his foolishness, this does not lead to self-knowledge or spiritual growth, but to invective and misery. He is also very solipsistic - life begins and ends with Timon. He degenerates into pessimism, outrage and vehemence. In his pessimism he does, however, enter into a kind of nihilistic greatness, for as Soellner says

The kinetic and cosmic images of these [last] speeches carry Timon from the anti-human to the superhuman stance.  
(Soellner, 1979, p 79)

One can ask, with Leon Rubin (in M.A. thesis) whether Timon is not schizophrenic, for his behaviour fits into the classic pattern of that condition.

The next most important character is Alcibiades, his career being the mirror-image of Timon's. His is the shorter part - indeed, one of his characterizations is the shortness and brevity of his speeches. He speaks always to the point, is deliberate and thoughtful. As Soellner points out

The importance of the man and what he stands for is under-lined by non-verbal means, by significant positioning in scenes, and by military uniform, army and martial sounds, (Soellner, 1979, p 50)

Unlike Timon, Alcibiades is a practical man who is mentally agile. The debate between him and the Senators (Act 3: scene v), as has been pointed out is one of the intellectual highlights and excitements of the play.

The other two prominent parts are the Steward and Apemantus, who are like characters in a Mystery play in that they represent characteristics, rather than being fully rounded characters. The Steward stands for faithfulness and Apemantus for cynicism.

It was not a requirement in Renaissance drama for the hero to understand his mental and moral predicaments, Shakespeare being unique in this, and modern audiences find a moral dimension wanting in *Timon of Athens*. Muriel Bradbrook suggests that

*Timon* is a 'show' or masque-like play (akin to Dekker's *The Sun's Darling*) which gives Timon's progress through the four seasons of the year (ending with Lent) and the four humours - sanguine, choleric, melancholy and phlegmatic, or watery, the last representing his death. Bradbrook, 1980, note on p 250)

As the Editors of *The Oxford Edition of the Complete Works* (1993) say, it is

...an exceptionally schematic play falling sharply into two sharply contrasting parts, the second a kind of mirror image of the first. Many of the



characters are presented two-dimensionally...but the exceptionally long role of Timon offers great opportunities to an actor who can convey his vulnerability as well as his virulence, especially in the strange music of the closing scenes which suggest in him a vision beyond the ordinary. (p 883)

These then are the problems facing any director of the play, but, whereas, in a main house, the space to be energized by a play already static would be detrimental to a vivid evening in the theatre, in a small space that energy is more contained, more concentrated. The Young Vic is such a space. It is a flexible theatre in which the seats can be arranged in a number of configurations. For this production Trevor Nunn, the director, and John Gunter, his designer, chose the courtyard formation. The stage, which was eight sided, jutted into the audience, the longest sides being at the left and right. From these two sides, up stage right and up stage left, a flight of shallow steps made entrances and exits possible. At the back there were simulated glass walls on which a classic painting of a woman's head was displayed. Steel struts went from the sides up into iron girders. For the second half of the production, the black glossy floor was covered with sand, withered trees and debris: at the back was a derelict car yard, Timon's cave being at the back of an old van. In the production notes, found, filed with the prompt copy, in the archives of the Young Vic, and copyrighted to Trevor Nunn (see Appendix 8) this second scene was described thus

The mountain of junk has spread forward like lava so that it covers much of the

space. Bushes and trees grow up through wrecked and discarded cars, cans and drums sit in the mud from which grass is untidily growing.

Members of the audience were able to see David Suchet (Timon) scrabble among this debris , picking up pieces of old tabloid newspapers, and unearthing roots to eat.

Trevor Nunn had adapted the text (see Prompt Book) and had decided to bring the action up to the present day. The play, of course, has little to do with Ancient Greece, though elements of the story come from there, but Shakespeare is not giving a portrait of that time, and even the names are not always Greek. The play could be taken as a satire on the money-grabbing propensities of the early Jacobean period with its material ethos but this ethos is also prevalent today. Indeed, the play could be set in any age as its main emotions are greed, ingratitude and disillusion. Leon Rubin set his 1972 Canadian production in the Middle Ages, while the Royal Shakespeare Company gave a vaguely Oriental setting for the 1981 production, with Richard Pasco, in *The Other Place*.

The modern setting of the Young Vic production caused some dissension among the critics. Charles Osborne in the *Daily Telegraph*: 8th March, 1991 wrote

Does Trevor Nunn assume that people are unable to recognise the relevance to today of a play about mindless profligacy, sycophancy and fierce misanthropy...If so, it is an arrogant



assumption and, I would suggest, an unwarrantable one. His simple-minded staging tends rather to obscure the import of Shakespeare's play.

Michael Billington, on the other hand, thought that Trevor Nunn's production was 'witty, intelligent and resourceful' (*The Guardian*: 8th March, 1991). Nunn himself wrote, in production notes that

"Athens" must be a fictional metropolis, neither palpably the City of London, or New York or Tokyo - but in some sense a cosmopolitan mixture of all these.

The story of Timon takes place now, or possibly next year, in this world which seems to have been constructed as a place to house, make, discuss and transfer money.

There are glimpses of a style of life which money making supports, but the connection back to the city, the bank, is never broken, until Timon passes into the wilderness of junk and detritus that lies abandoned in the hinterland beyond.

Explaining his decision to set the play in modern dress, Nunn says that it was partly a shortage of money, but, also, because the play was

...a caustic account of the way our priorities change when we get near money, and ironically this rarity is

extraordinarily relevant to how we live now. (See Appendix 8)

To support this concept scenes were set in modern situations, 'more Timon of Ascot than *Timon of Athens*' according to Malcolm Rutherford of *The Financial Times*, 8th March, 1991. The opening scene was a Press Conference in Timon's Office to announce his acquisition of the painting, with Journalists and TV cameras. Some of the lines given in the original to the Poet and the Painter were now given to the Journalist (Jaye Griffiths) and the Interviewer (Indre Ovré). Act 2 scene i was set in an airport: and a later scene was played as a pheasant shoot. Act 111 scene ii from 'Who, the Lord Timon?' took place at Ascot, with a jockey in attendance, while the next scene was played in a locker room, and other scenes took place in offices. These places were indicated by furniture and costume, rather than scene changes. Michael Billington (*The Guardian*, 8th March 1991) commented that this gave

...sharp definition to those repetitive scenes in which Timon's false chums refuse him a loan in his hour of need...Shakespeare's general assault on ingratitude becomes a specific attack on mercantile values in which friendship is determined by credit worthiness.

After Timon's great speech in Act 1V scene ii he turned upstage and to quote from the production notes again

...The City is reflected in the glass [at the back] - Timon passes through the glass and a mountain of junk appears. He climbs it steadily.



It was in the second act that Nunn made considerable changes to the text (see Prompt Book in the Young Vic Archives). The first speech of Timon's which began the act was a compilation of several long speeches that Timon makes in this part of the play. The scene with the two senators came after the bandit scene and Apemantus made a later appearance than is shown in the original text. But this served to tighten the action and balance it with the first act. Certainly, the night the writer saw a performance, the action went swiftly and the audience's attention was caught all the way through.

Nunn made little use of entries through the audience, though the play started by combat troops jumping onto the stage, using flashlights, giving the impression of a beleaguered city. At the end the senators and Alcibiades's forces negotiated through megaphones from each end of the theatre, enmeshing the audience in their talk - the small theatre resounding with noise, clash of arms and the whirring of a helicopter. The stage and set, itself, according to David Suchet (see letter in Appendix 7) very much dictated the actions on stage. Cast members were able to come down the steps, and execute a swirl around it, exiting either by means of the same staircase, or by the one on the other side of the stage. This was executed several times, particularly in the opening scene and for the banquet scene, where, instead of a formal masque, a troop of girls paraded and strutted, in eighteenth century costumes down the left hand staircase onto the main stage. The production notes said that the entertainment should be

...more sophisticated than striptease...  
 women divest 18th century ball gowns to  
 reveal contemporary sleaze beneath.

There are three good rôles in this play. Timon, himself: Apemantus and Alcibiades. The play shows the descent of Timon from riches and the rise of Alcibiades from disgrace. David Suchet is an actor who can compel an audience, particularly in a part which he can display his skill in verse-speaking. He was all silky charm in the first scenes, and full of bitterness in the second part. As Paul Taylor (*The Independent*, 8th March 1991) commented, Suchet expertly communicated a sense of emotional insecurity throughout the play and seemed to be spiritually 'out to lunch'. Billington (*The Guardian*, same date) commented on his emotional solitude, and throughout the first act, Suchet showed great sweetness which accentuated the bitterness of the second act. Though he in no way played to the audience there was a perception that it was included in the scenes, that they were guests at his banquet, observers at the Press Conference and at Ascot. In the second part, he withdrew more into himself, but the great tirade, before he departs from Athens was given out to the front with great passion, as though Timon was addressing a crowd of people. Suchet says (see Letter in Appendix 7) that he was aware of the audience the whole time, and that there was no sense of privacy on stage. Wherever he turned there was the audience. The set dictated movement, which circled round the stage, and at all times, at least some of the audience was seeing full frontal acting. At the same time, other members of the audience saw the action from a different perspective - as in real life. In the second act, unlike the tirade, when Suchet spoke his soliloquies, he scurried around the stage, searching for food, reading old scraps of newspapers (which were identifiable to the audience as tabloids) facing all different ways. Timon is a part which an actor has to add much. In the first acts he can appear rather passive and uninteresting. The passionate feelings which he expresses gives the actor more of chance to show his skills, especially those of verse-speaking. A



small space, because it needs less energizing than a large space, can help the actor make the character less colourless. By that, I mean, that the small range of emotion allows itself to more subtle expression - a twitch of the face, seen in a small space, is lost in a larger theatre. Many of the critics commented on the brilliance of Suchet's playing in this space, Rhoda Koenig in *Punch*, 13th March 1991 saying

...Suchet's beautifully controlled performance...is the more powerful for the power being held in check.

Because of the small space, the performance could be controlled for the verse did not have to be rhetorically spoken. Though the effect when Suchet did, such as in Timon's tirade, was even more effective because it seemed to fill the whole theatre. Barry Foster (Apemantus), in his letter to the writer (see Appendix 7) said that the Young Vic had 'a very dead acoustic' and that the actors had to project as much as in a proscenium arch theatre!

Alcibiades was played by Jerome Flynn with the right kind of bovine masculinity, swaggering and martial. At the end, his troops were deployed all round the theatre, in a menacing manner, and the audience were used as a body of citizens who were witnessing actual events. The third main part is that of Apementus, played by Barry Foster. The production notes were very definite about Apemantus. Nunn wrote that he should be a disturbing presence - foul-smelling, unwashed and dangerous in manner. This was achieved by Barry Foster, dressed as an old tramp in a woolly hat. He snarled at mankind

and sneered at the audience, yet presented a sane mind in a crazed world - a less virulent, more cultured and better balanced Thersites.

The scenes in *Timon* move swiftly, one unspecified location following another. It was a strength of this production that Nunn gave specific locations (such as Ascot, a locker room) to these short scenes. The change from the city to the waste land was engineered swiftly at the interval, and, again did not impair the rhythm of the play. Timon's ending, which in the text is not specific was handled artfully. Suchet shot himself in his van, his body was then brought to centre stage by the Steward and the lights went down with the vision of Timon being cradled in the arms of his most faithful retainer.

Trevor Nunn in his notes (see Appendix 8) said that in this play

... Shakespeare probes the motives for and responses to philanthropy and charts the progress of a generous man on a catastrophic declension through disillusion to a misanthropy so virulent that even the most hardened and ruthless cynic might blench at it.

That this production was successful is evident from the long, complimentary reviews which appeared, though some were critical of the modern setting. Very few of the notices, though, commented on the use of the space, but as Barry Foster said in his letter 'you were there', for both actors and audience were sharing the same space, the same time and were breathing the same air, following



Timon's rise and fall of fortune with emotion. The audience left the theatre very quietly, disturbed, not only by what they had experienced, but disturbed because this play mirrored our own time with its concern with monetary values rather than spiritual ones. Happiness is not found in the extravagant and excessive behaviour seen in this play and Trevor Nunn had shown the audience the relevance of this text to modern life. Far from being an arid debate, which it might have been in a large theatre (no production of this play has been done in a main house during the period being written about), this production, in a small space spoke to the audience in an eloquent manner. The audience was forced to acknowledge the truth of the text by the truth of the staging and the truth of the acting. Like an epidemic, the bitterness infecting the acting spread to the audience in a vivid way, for there was no division between actors and audience. As Malcolm Rutherford wrote

You may not approve of it, I cannot guarantee you will like it, but at least it will stir you up...It will be remembered for a long time to come.  
(*Financial Times*: 9th March 1991)

John Peter (*Sunday Times*: 10th March, 1991) that

The production is challenging too, because intellectually it keeps you at the edge of your seat.

Not only intellectually: the audience were enrapt because they were involved in the action. In a small

space, the audience gets different views of the character, not just frontal or side view, but an all-rounded view. It was also surrounded by the characters standing round the theatre at the back in the military scenes, and finally, by being able to see small details - the tabloid newspapers: the name of the sports equipment and the shampoo (Wash 'n Go) in the locker room and the name of the desk-computer. It was real life, besides being artifice.



# THE WINTER'S TALE

THE YOUNG VIC, THE CUT.

Autumn, 1991

DIRECTOR	David Thacker
DESIGNER	Shelagh Keegan
LEONTES	Trevor Eve
HERMOINE	Rudi Davies

*The Winter's Tale* is one of the so-called Last Plays of Shakespeare in which he was experimenting in forms, using romantic stories of wrongs and forgiveness. Peter Hall pointed out when he directed three of the plays at the Cottesloe, which were then transferred to the Olivier, that these plays

...are not works of gentle resignation, but look fiercely at lust, jealousy, and betrayal. Like all archetypal stories, they don't wrap up the truth but go straight for it. They are unblinking, and refuse to accept easy answers. The plays are hard-edged, sharp, absolute. Jealousy is a terrible sickness...

(Warren, 1990, p 19)

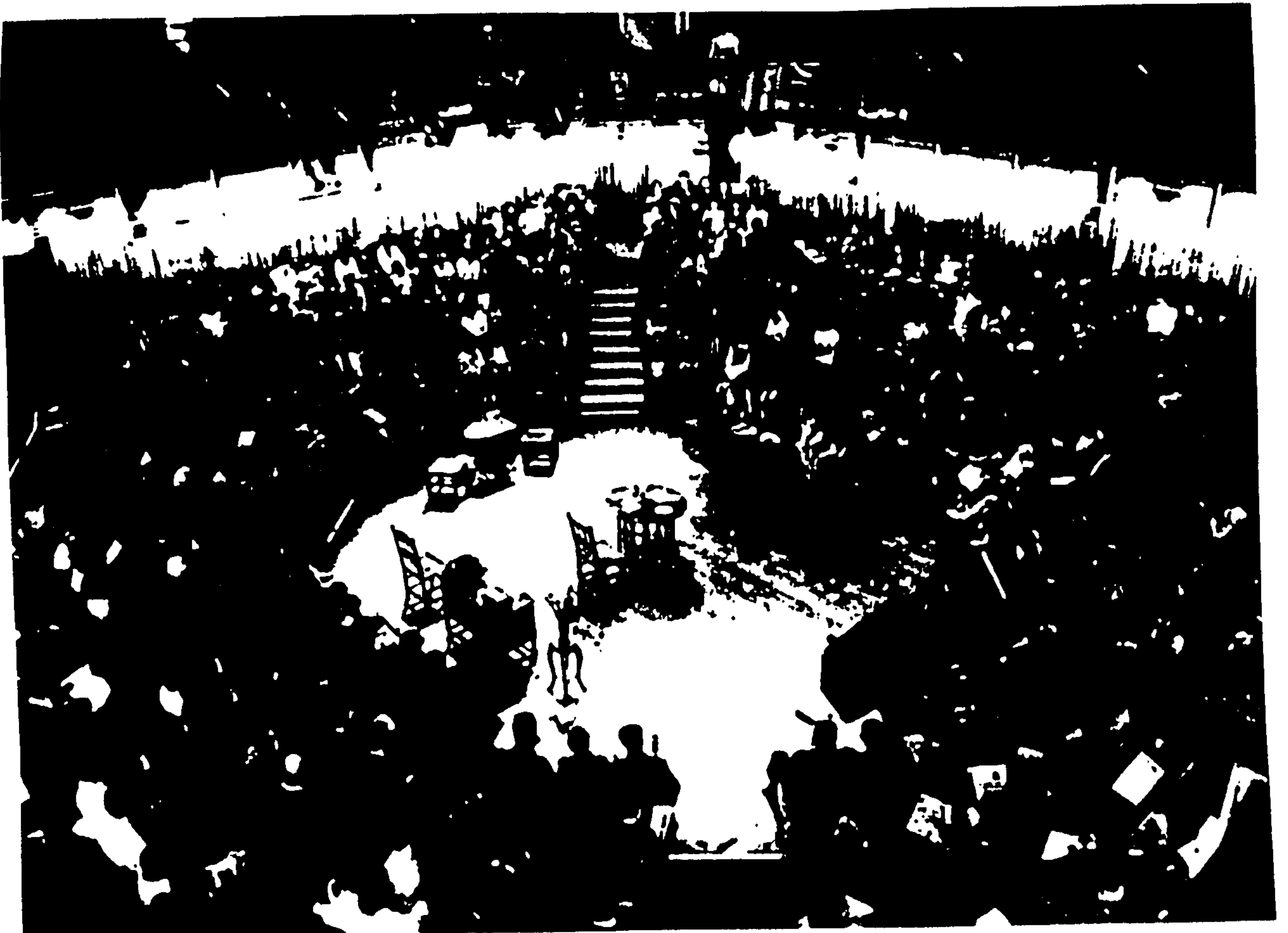
## YOUNG VIC, LONDON

### Acting Area:

(in the round) 8.5 metres by 8 metres

(courtyard) 10 metres by 7 metres

Capacity: circa 450 according to seat  
arrangement



from: Mulryne and Shewring, 1995, p 173



There is, however, one theme in the plays that seems to have been largely ignored, that is, three of the plays deal with women who have either been outcast physically (*Pericles* / *The Winter's Tale*) or lost to the society to which they belong by acting or appearing to act, against that society (*Cymbeline* / *The Winter's Tale*). As Valerie Traub explains

To be a woman in Shakespearean drama means to embody a sexuality that often finds its ultimate expression in death.  
(Traub, 1992, p 25)

In three of the last plays, however, the sentence is not death, but transmuted, and the heroines put to shame their menfolk. Hermione, Perdita, Paulina, Innogen and Marina, are particularly strong-minded and tough women. Shakespeare's comedy heroines are all independent and self-reliant: Rosalind, Beatrice, Hermia, Helena and Viola, are outspoken, witty and know what they want. They confront the conventions of their society. The heroines in the romances go further and really break from their society, showing the male characters the errors of their shabby ways. Marina shames a ruler of a state by refusing to be bought: Innogen refuses to be bartered in marriage which, as a princess, she should conventionally have done. Hermione and Paulina collude in bringing Leontes to true repentance, while Perdita defies a king, to marry whom she wants, taking the bold step of running away with Florizel. Women, then, who defy the place of women in their time, who win through, who change the men in their lives, making them realize that women should be treated with care, gentleness and love: who prove that authoritarian, sadistic behaviour is not appropriate: who teach that love and care is necessary for good relationships both within and without

marriage. These are elements in *The Winter's Tale*.

It is also one of Shakespeare's plays about the corroding and dreadful effects of jealousy and male anxiety. In the opinion of Valerie Traub

...male anxiety towards female erotic power is channelled into a strategy of containment; the erotic threat of the female body is physically contained by means of a metaphoric and dramatic transformation of women into jewels, statues and corpses. Indeed, together, the plays [*Hamlet, Othello, The Winter's Tale*] seem motivated towards this end: to give women speech only to silence them; to make women move only to still them; to represent their bodies on stage only to enclose them; to infuse their bodies with warmth only to "encorpse" them. (Traub, 1992, p 26)

In *The Winter's Tale* jealousy is more fully explored, and Leontes, who suffers from this sin, is made to repent truly and fully, leading to a reconciliation with both of those whom he has sinned against. He is a king, so his jealousy cannot be private, for it affects his kingdom, doing it much harm. Because of his actions, his kingdom is left without an heir, his son being dead and his daughter supposedly so. He loses two of his most trusted advisers because of his actions, and his guiltless Queen is made to suffer public humiliation. He is a 'jealous tyrant'. But he is also a sick man. He suffers from a condition which he describes as *tremor cordis* and this might contribute to his sick fantasy, but his jealousy is very potent



.....Is whispering nothing?  
 Is leaning cheek to cheek? is meeting noses  
 Kissing with inside lip? stopping the career  
 Of laughter with a sigh? (a note infallible  
 Of breaking honesty)? horsing foot on foot?  
 Skulking in corners? wishing clocks more swift?  
 Hours, minutes? noon , midnight? and all eyes  
 Blind with the pin and web, but theirs; theirs only  
 That would unseen be wicked? is this nothing?  
 Why then the world, and all that's in't, is nothing  
 The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing  
 My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings  
 If this be nothing. (Act 1 scene ii)

#### Derek Traversi comments

In Leontes, it (sexual passion) is the  
 evil impulse which comes to the surface,  
 destroying his friendship with Polixenes  
 and leading him to turn upon Hermione  
 with an animal intensity of feeling.  
 (Traversi, 1965, p 112)

Though, as Stanley Wells points out

The manifest imbalance of Leontes's state  
 of mind induces detachment rather than  
 involvement, pointed out in the play by  
 the incredulity of his cupbearer Camillo  
 and the more active ridicule of the  
 courtier Antigonus and his strong-minded  
 wife Paulina; they channel off some of  
 the audiences's reaction as normal

spectators, helping to prevent the story from reaching tragic dimensions. (Wells, p 1994,p 343)

The tragic dimension, it can be argued is not there because, unlike a similar victim of his jealousy, Othello, Leontes is the smaller man. John Nettles, who played Leontes in the Royal Shakespeare Company's 1992 production, thinks that Leontes is

...a simpleton. There is not one line which indicates that he has any ability to think straight at all...he's extremely lightweight. (*Mason Croft Review vol: 3: 1995,p 17*)

But what of the Queen, Hermione, who, unwittingly, triggers off this jealousy? In the first scene in which she appears, she is pregnant and has another child, a small boy, Mamilius. She is entertaining her husband's best friend, Polixenes, who has been staying with them for nine months - time enough to get her pregnant, as Leontes accuses her. But there is nothing in her manner to suggest anything but friendliness. She is the embodiment of queenly civility, and has a charm that is evident. She is lightly and deftly sketched in, but, at this stage, no more than a charming heroine (as we suppose). Her real strength of character is not shown until the Trial scene. Her strength resides in her dignity as a wife and mother, her marriage her domain, which is shattered by her husband's jealousy. His accusations lead to imprisonment, the birth of her child, and standing a prisoner in a State Trial. It is a public occasion, but she pleads for herself with integrity and dignity. She states her case



.....Foe behold me

A fellow of the royal bed, which owe  
A moiety to the throne, a great king's daughter,  
The mother of a hopeful prince, here standing  
To prate and talk of life and honour 'fore  
Who please to come and hear. (Act 3 scene ii)

She points out that she was in Leontes's 'grace' before Polixenes came to visit, and that she always acted with honour and according to Leontes's will. 'The crown and comfort' of her life is Leontes's love and her child. She is, however, pre-judged and departs to prison where she seemingly dies, for Leontes in Derek Traversi's words

...is not concerned with establishing or discovering the truth but to confirm what he has made himself believe...he craves for this confirmation as an alternative to the sense of chaos which is one of the accompaniments of unleashed passion.  
(Traversi, 1965, pp 116/7)

But Leontes's jealousy is unreasoning - he refuses to believe the Oracle of Delphi and retribution strikes. Even then, he cannot repent and he is dreadful in his sadistic behaviour. When shown his new-born babe he cries

My child? away with't! Even thou, that hast  
A heart so tender o'er it, take it hence  
And see it instantly consum'd with fire;

Even thou, and none but thou. Take it up straight  
 Within this hour bring me word 'tis done.

(Act 2 scene iii)

Through the pleading of the courtiers he commutes this sentence to exposure in a bleak place, the sadism of the scene is imprinted on the audience, and the following scenes, where Antigonus exposes the child, his pursuit by the bear, this subsequent death, and the wreck of the ship which had brought him) all add to the horror of the story. Even the scene with the Shepherd and his son, which has some comedy in it, underlines the harshness of Leontes's behaviour and the tragic events caused by it.

That is the first part of the play, and is where a natural break occurs, for the second part opens sixteen years later. Shakespeare uses the device of Time to explain what has happened in the preceding years, and we are quickly transported to a pastoral scene. This is not the fantastic pastoral of *As you Like It* but the pastoral of Warwickshire where Shakespeare was born. The sheep-shearing festival shows a community which is quite prosperous and is rooted in real life. The details in the scene are realistic and, even, homely. And Autolycus adds a spice to them. The dramatic interest in the scene, though, is in the love of Florizel, the King's son for Perdita, Leontes's long lost daughter who has been brought up by the Shepherd. These two are not what they seem, though to the other characters they are just what they seem to be - a young man and woman of the same class who are in love and who want to marry. They are innocent, and, unlike Rosalind and Orlando they are not playing games. It is a delicate and charming state. Nonetheless, Florizel is in disguise and is risking, at the very least, his father, Polixenes's wrath, if he marries out of his sphere. When Polixenes and Camillo come in disguise



his father forbids the marriage and, again, sadism enters the play for Polixenes turns on Perdita crying

I'll have thy beauty scratched with briars  
And made more homely than thy state.....  
I will devise a death as cruel for thee  
As thou are tended to't. (Act 4 scene iv)

His brutality in separating the lovers is parallel to Leontes's rejection of his marriage, and shows how dependent young people were on the whims of their fathers and, in the case of women, on their husbands and fathers-in-law. The young lovers, though, have much moral integrity, and, believing in their love they, chastely make their way to Leontes's court, which is now a place of repentance and remorse. Under the domination of Paulina, Leontes's has been made to see the error of his ways and the ending comes with reconciliation between the two kings, Hermione and her husband and the young lovers are allowed to marry.

Shakespeare has been criticised by some critics for the awkwardness of the structure of this play, but time has to pass to allow Perdita to come of marriageable age, make Leontes realize the enormity of his crime and repent of the three (seeming) deaths for which he was responsible. The way that it is revealed to him that two of those deaths did not actually happen, is one of the most skilful and magical in the whole canon, and one of the most daring and difficult to stage. The story of Perdita's past is not told directly on stage, but by a backstairs gossip scene among the gentlemen at court: we do not see the principals' reactions, but are told about them, a masterly stroke which keeps the suspension going. The action and the reconciliation is further held up with, again, some sadistic scenes between the

Shepherd and Autolycus, accentuating the underlying sadism of this play. The final scene, of the Statue coming to life completes the play, 'Our Perdita is found', the Queen is vindicated and the family is reunited. As Derek Traversi writes

[The last scene is ] an admirable example of the manner in which the artificiality of conventional Elizabethan prose has been turned to a purpose which transcends its apparent limitations. (Traversi, 1965, p 185)

Not only prose, but poetry as well, for, particularly in the sheepshearing scenes, Shakespeare shows his mastery of pastoral poetry while, elsewhere, he uses a sinewy verse to express the emotions of jealousy, indignation, integrity and dignity.

Leontes, we hope, has learnt from his experience and will never again treat women as objects. But what of Perdita? And what of Hermione? Can they ever forget that the nature of their husband and father is sadistic, selfish and self-centred. Can he really have changed? The audience never find out, but leaving the theatre ponder on these questions, ones which would have made an absorbing play. One that Shakespeare never wrote.

The Young Vic, for this production, was arranged with its tiered seats in an oval shape, divided into four sections by flights of stairs, in one of which Hermione stood for the Trial scene, and when she was a statue. Time, also, made her speech to start the second part of the play from one of these flights, moving down the stairs, onto the centre space. The acting area was a



timber disk, slightly raised. The cast was, therefore, working in the round, not just facing one way. For the court scenes a small settle was brought in and placed diagonally in front of one of the flight of stairs. For the pastoral scenes, the cast brought on buckets filled with corn and flowers, and placed them around the rim on which they sat. The actors moved round more than they would have on a proscenium arch stage, for they had to include each part of the audience at some time or other. Standing characters on the flight of steps made them visible to the whole audience. This meant that each section was getting a different viewpoint at any one time. The cast came down the steps and onto the disk throughout and exited again through the audience. For example Antigonus's exit, 'pursued by a bear' was up a flight of steps, and the Shepherd entered by another flight, and his son by a third, which gave a breadth to the action. According to Irving Wardle the disk allowed the cast to explore 'the piece to its depth with the utmost simplicity' (*Independent on Sunday*: 15th September, 1991).

The costumes were nineteenth century, vaguely Russian in feel. The men wore greatcoats, high-necked tunics, with baggy breeches and boots, while the women wore pinafore dresses, with long skirt and laced bodices over blouses. Their heads were bound with scarves. This type of costume was repeated for the pastoral scenes, though the materials were coarser and the girls wore aprons. For the rustic dance the men wore straw masks and phalluses, which were witty rather than vulgar. The lighting (Designer: Jim Simmons) was hard and cold for the first part, but, from the pastoral scenes onwards the acting area was bathed in a golden light which symbolized the happiness of the peasants and the reconciliation to come. There was one exception to this generalised lighting: when Leontes's had one of his

'fits' as in *tremor cordis* speech, a spotlight shone on him, the rest of the cast being motionless and in the dark. Paul Taylor saw this as an imprisoning of Leontes within his own mind, saying

Seen in stark, simple close-ups Leontes's descent into mad jealousy...[is] communicated with particular power. (*The Independent*: 14th September, 1991)

However, this device, it could be argued, was somewhat distracting, removing the actor in a rather contrived manner, and, as was also seen in the Canadian production of *Hamlet* (see under) very artificial. If the peculiar merit of a small space production is that of the audience and actors being in the same room, then it seems perverse to then remind the audience of the theatre's ability to make striking lighting effects. It alienated the audience, and lost one of the valuable assets of small scale theatre, that actors and audience of being able to communicate with each other directly.

David Thacker evidently saw this as Leontes's play. He told Lydia Conway in *What's On*, 4th September, 1991, that

It is very compassionate and I don't think Shakespeare was in any way hostile to Leontes. He shows in a very rich way what creates those delusions, what people are capable of in the grip of intense paranoia, and that life has within it the possibility of forgiveness and restoration given genuine repentance.



It is a very optimistic play and you have to go with it. There is no room for cynicism.

The phrase 'go with it' is significant, for though Thacker let the text speak for itself in a simple setting, without any disturbing concept inappropriate to a small space, his optimistic overview softened the innate sadism of the play. Perhaps Thacker thought it might be overwhelming in that space. Certainly, in the case of the bear, Thacker produced an imaginative solution which was entirely suitable to this space. Main House Companies have provided other solutions, not nearly so convincing. The English Shakespeare Company's 1990 tour had Michael Pennington, who played Leontes, stride onto the stage with a bear's paw on his hand, which was confusing. Terry Hands in his RSC 1986 production had an enormous bear skin as a back cloth and at this point, it reared up to the flies with accompanying music. David Thacker eschewed all artificial devices and as the stage darkened, great roars were heard over the sound system gradually filling the auditorium and then faded and the mewling of the baby could be heard. As Charles Spencer wrote

[it was] thus genuinely more frightening rather than the usual comic intruder from pantomime. (*Daily Telegraph*: 17th September 1991)

It was an effect which was entirely apt for a small space but which might have been too minimal for a larger theatre.

As has been said, the second part opened with the figure

of Time appearing, with a large book in her hands, on one of the flight of steps. Again, a simple solution. One that was suited to the space and unpretentiousness of the production. Adrian Noble had a very imaginative solution in his Royal Shakespeare production in 1993. Balloons were a *leit motif* throughout the play, being used in the first scenes, which were set as Mamilius's birthday party, and used phallically in the rustic dance. At the beginning of the second part, Polixenes and Camillo, looking older, were seen reading in deck chairs. A balloon descended onto the stage (only possible when in a theatre with flies) bearing Time's message, which was then read by Camillo (Benjamin Whitrow).

Thacker's solution, faithful to the text, made for a smooth transition to the rustic scenes. As has been said, the country was portrayed, not by scenery, impossible in this setting, but by buckets of corn and flowers, and with a dramatic change of light. The music, too, became simpler: a single violin, which now had been playing romantic themes, started to play folk music - again, an effect that would have been lost in a large theatre, but which sounded plangent in this small space. The whole scene was played with gaiety and, because the cast were sitting round the edge of the disk, the audience, too, seemed to become part of the feast. Peter Hall regards the pastoral scene as 'one of the hardest in Shakespeare' for he thinks that it is difficult to strike a balance between the literary artificiality of the scene and the very real emotions displayed in it. The scene needs to have a strong sense of a tightly knit rural community, which is disturbed by the intrusion of the disguised Polixenes and Camillo. It is a joyous scene until the unmasking of Florizel and the audience should enjoy these scenes after the harrowing drama of the preceding scenes. By sitting his cast on the edge of the stage, by having his



dancers enter through the audience, Thacker involved the whole theatre in the festivities, which would not have been an option in a proscenium arch theatre.

One of the problems in this play is the casting of Hermione and Perdita, whom we meet, grown-up in this scene for the first time. As mother and daughter there should be some similarity in height and colouring, and Rudi Davies and Sarah-Jane Fenton did have this advantage. Thacker, though, taking a more light-hearted view of the text than it can support, did not emphasise the brutality of the imprisoning and trial of Hermione. This is a scene that can shock the audience, as a defenceless and helpless woman is put to trial. Hermione is one of the few pregnant women in Shakespeare and the only one whose pregnancy has an important part to play in the plot. The other pregnancies (Jacquenetta's (*Love's Labour's Lost*) and Juliet's (*Measure for Measure*) are more plot devices than integral while Helena's (*All's Well That Ends Well*) is a happy conclusion to that play. The actress in this part and scene should convey the pain and soreness that results from childbirth. Of the seven or eight productions which the writer has seen only one actor, Samantha Bond, in the Royal Shakespeare Company's 1993 production has done this. She really looked weak, and did not, as most Hermiones do (Rudi Davies included), march into the Trial scene looking well. Another question in this scene is how Hermoine should be dressed. In most productions she appears in her previous clothes - Van Dyke costume for Sally Dexter in Peter Hall's 1988 production: Edwardian for Samantha Bond, while David Williams (1986) in Ontario put Goldie Semple in rough sack-cloth and fetters, which according to Roger Warren (1990) greatly shocked the audience. Williams had underlined the sadism of the play. It is perhaps more important in a small space to emphasize Hermione's distress than in a larger production where

Hermione's distress ~~than in a larger production~~ where extras playing courtiers can express the disgust and horror that Leontes's behaviour should provoke. The audience in a small space production should be made to realize Hermione's distress in a graphic and visual way.

It is not, of course, until the last scene of all that we meet Hermione again. This is a scene which Thacker thinks is one of the most beautiful and brave things that Shakespeare ever wrote, but he thought that it needed a great deal of commitment from his cast. He wanted them to display a rare emotional nakedness, and, it can be argued, that in the intimacy of a small space this is the more affecting, because of the nearness of the audience and the easier rapport between it and the actors. Trevor Eve (Leontes) told Heather Neill (*Sunday Times*: 8th September 1991) that Thacker

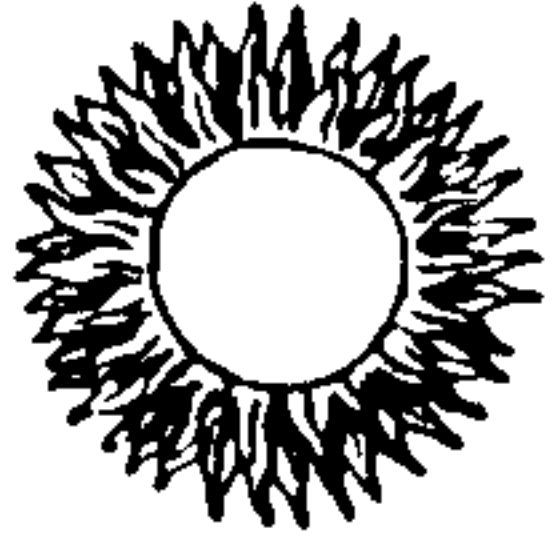
'is completely devoid of cynicism. He is like a naïve painter. If something is emotionally true he has the courage to stand by it'.

The emotional impact in the small space was communicated with particular power. It must be said though, had this not happened the Statue scene would have not been effective. Hermione stood on one of the flights of steps, veiled and very little in the way of lighting or music helped the action. On a large stage all the effects that can be produced in the way of scenery, lighting and music can be used, but this is not possible in the simple conditions of the Young Vic. Trevor Nunn in his 1969 production had Hermione and Perdita played by the same actor (Judi Dench) and this meant that most of Perdita's lines were cut in this scene and a lot of



THE WINTER'S TALE

THE YOUNG VIC: Costumes by Sheila Keegan



Leontes



Hermione

courtesy of the Young Vic

swirling around took place, with trick lighting, so that Dench and her understudy could change places. But none of this was possible in this production, as the audience was too near to allow of too much tricky illusion. Thacker and his cast played it simply, relying on the text to give the emotional quality the scene needs. As Charles Spencer said

Thacker's energies have gone into capturing the sense and rhythm of the play and the audience sits in rapt attention throughout, almost hypnotised by a story which offers so moving a view of man at both his worst and his best.  
[Its] dark comfortlessness is... played...with great truth and simplicity.  
(*Daily Telegraph*: 17th September, 1991)

The very simplicity of this production might have made it seem inadequate in a large auditorium: certainly the performances would have had to have broadened, but then we would have lost the concentration and 'emotional nakedness' that Thacker's cast produced. What made this production work was because everyone trusted the text - they believed that Shakespeare knew best and that if you tell one of his plays simply and with truth, then the story is so gripping, the characters so true, that the plays need little embellishment. The acting and direction made the audience listen to the words. Christopher Edwards writing in *The Spectator* (14th September) said that

The great virtues of the production are its simplicity, balance and control.  
The rhythm of the play is perfectly judged and all over the production hangs



an elusive dream-like quality that is right for this play...on a largely bare stage.

Thacker used all the entrances and exits available to him: he involved the audience in the action by allowing them to participate in the scenes, by surrounding them with his cast, and then allowed that cast to speak with intelligence and emotion to present a production which was right for that space, with its bareness, and ability to entrap the audience in the action.

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

CENTURY THEATRE NATIONAL TOURING COMPANY

THE LILIAN BAYLIS THEATRE, LONDON.

April 1993

part of Tour which included Crewe, Blackpool,  
Winchester, Chesterfield, Poole, Harlow, Buxton and  
Whitley Bay.

DIRECTOR	Stephen Unwin
DESIGNER	Bunny Christie
THESEUS/OBERON	Robert Langdon Loyd
HIPPOLYTA/TITANIA	Elizabeth McKechnie

also

THE GEORGIAN FILM ACTORS' STUDIO

THE PIT, THE BARBICAN, LONDON.

November 1994

originally performed at the Film Actors' Studio,  
Tiblisi, 1992 and subsequently at the Edinburgh Fringe  
Festival, 1993.



DIRECTOR	Mikhail Tumanishvili
DESIGNER	George and Ketí Alexi-Meskhishvili
THESEUS/OBERON	Zaza Mikashavidze
HIPPOLYTA/TITANIA	Eka Kakiani

Perceptions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have changed greatly over the years from seeing it as a charming fairy tale, mainly for children, to seeing it a piece of Elizabethan pornography. Current criticism, as Gary Waller puts it

...insists that we ask not only 'what does that mean' but rather 'what does that say to us now? How can we make that work for us, here in our place and time?' (Waller, 1991, pp7/8)

With *A Midsummer Night's Dream* this is particularly difficult as the assumptions that were made in Shakespeare's day - that there were such spirits as fairies, that working men are expected to be subservient to their betters, that fathers have absolute rights over their grown-up children (particularly daughters) and that laws are harsh, are not made today in our country. But given that our society's way of thinking is different, there remains the undeniable fact that this play is both enjoyable and complex. In it there are three separate groups of characters who play out their own particular story, and though one of the groups, the fairies, comes into contact with and changes the fortunes of the other two groups, we do not see all three groups together until the final scene. The way

the play is constructed is masterly, for just as a audience thinks it has had enough of one group, another group takes over. And, at the end, we find that a group of young people learn, through events they cannot control, to grow up and find that real love is not an illusion: a man exceedingly sure of himself learns that there are other things beyond his limited knowledge; the fairies learn that harmony is better than discord; and those in authority learn that sometimes it is not right to insist on the letter of the law, for it should be tempered by common-sense. That this is accomplished by magic matters not a whit, for it is all a dream and, when at the end, the fairies come to bless the house and Puck asks for our applause, we too, should wake up from that dream, having learnt something.

Harley Granville Barker says in the 1914 Preface to the play that

...someday I really must ask a modern audience to sit through two hours and a half of Shakespeare without a break; the play would gain greatly. This is less absurd, that is all, than the Johnsonian five act division of the Folio, for which, of course, there is no authority.  
(Granville Barker, 1974, p 39)

There is no obvious division in this play as there was, for instance, in *The Winter's Tale* and *Timon of Athens* and, nowadays, directors tend to break the play in two, as Peter Brook did in his renowned 1970 production, and as Adrian Noble also did in his 1994 production both of which ended the first part with Titania and Bottom going in procession to her bower.



The other remarkable thing about this play , though, is that even at this early stage of his career (*circa* 1594) Shakespeare shows complete mastery of many forms of verse. From the iambic pentameter, to rhyming couplets which are used when the lovers are infatuated, rather than truly loving: from nonsense verse to the cheery short-lined verse used by Puck. For the Mechanicals he uses prose of a supple and subtle variety which adds its own colour to the marvellous fluent appeal of the language throughout the play. Much of the magic in the play is made believable through the language, the fairies are credible because of it, the Mechanicals are funny because of it. It weaves a spell on audiences as surely as Oberon and Puck weave a spell on everyone in the forest. Music and dancing, too, are an integral part of this play, the lyrical quality of the verse merging into song - the lullaby sung to Titania is dramatically important, for she has to sleep in order for the love juice to be put on her eyes, and, this, in turn, instigates her humiliation. At the end of the play, she, like the lovers, knows the difference between love and infatuation. The music of Mendelssohn, familiar and much played, perhaps, seems out-of-date today though Ilona Sekacz wittily set it to jazz rhythms for John Caird's 1989 production for the RSC, which was both traditional and modern. The music in Shakespeare's day would, of course, have been original, presumably, and of a more simple nature. Dance, too, plays a part, and can help to create the magic of the forest, especially, as in Adrian Noble's 1994/5 production the fairies are given stylised movements. Dramatically, too, dance is important - Titania and Oberon dance to celebrate their reconciliation and the Mechanicals' dance shows their exuberance. The fairies' blessing, too, gives an opportunity for a dance to round off the evening.

Of the three groups of characters, the Athenians, the

Fairies, and the Mechanicals, the latter are, at first reading, the most real, the group with which it is most easy to identify, for they are men whom we might encounter in everyday lives and who are in a situation (amateur dramatics) in which many people take part. In *Bully Bottom*, too, Shakespeare created one of his comic masterpieces. He is the man who is so exuberant in his love of life that he feels that he can master anything and everything. He bursts with enthusiasm - a deluded enthusiasm, and his journey in the play makes him realize that enthusiasm has to be tempered by knowledge of self. His speech about his dream is revealing as he understands that there is more to life than his previous narrow reckoning. This does not, however, diminish his gusto, as is shown in the following scenes, but this becomes more tempered and more gentle. The rest of the tradesmen are, also, well-defined characters: the pedantic Peter Quince: the gauche Flute: the willingness of Snout and Snug and the precision of Starveling are all shown in small touches of speech.

The young people can seem rather shallow and interchangeable: the only things that obviously distinguishes the girls are their height. A closer examination reveals definite characteristics. Of the two, Helena is the more submissive - she is prepared to be treated as Demetrius's spaniel, a woman who will always submit to her man. Hermia is more fiery, with an independent spirit, and the dream that she has during the play is full of Freudian imagery. The snake eating her heart shows how much Lysander means to her and how determined she is to have her will and marry him (for full discussion of Hermia's dream, see Norman N. Holland in Waller, 1991, p 75). She may be, as Helena claims, a spitfire, but she will always be loyal and loving. The two young men, Lysander and Demetrius, are not so well defined, but give scope for the actors to flesh them out. Theseus and Hippolyta are distinguished by the



high order of their verse, and nowadays, it is fashionable to give Hippolyta a feminist stance, as Queen of the Amazons.

Since 1970 many directors have followed Peter Brook in having the same actor play Oberon as Theseus and the same actress play Hippolyta/Titania (John Caird (1989): Adrian Noble (1994) and the two productions discussed below). There is no knowledge, of course, whether this happened in the original performances, but given the small number of actors in Shakespeare's company it is probable. Certainly, if they are played by the same actors, this gives an added resonance to the play and enhances the dream-like quality. The fairy couple are more spirited than the human couple (perhaps *they* foreshadow what Theseus and Hippolyta may become). It is the fairy couples quarrels and experiences that contemporary critics, from Kott onwards, mainly base their contentions that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is highly charged with sex. Earlier critics did not comment on the possibility that Titania and Bottom actually made love, but Kott thinks that, to punish Titania, Oberon wants her to sleep with a beast - a recurrent theme in pornographic literature. Kott quotes the speech

The next thing when she waking looks upon  
Be it lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,  
On meddling monkey or on busy ape,  
She shall pursue it with the soul of love.  
Be it ounce, or cat, or bear,  
Pard or boar with bristled hair...(Act 2 scene i)

As Kott points out, all these animals

...represent abundant sexual potency, and some of them play an important part in sexual demonology. Bottom is eventually transformed into an ass. But in this nightmarish summer night, the ass does not symbolize stupidity. Since antiquity and up to the Renaissance the ass was credited with the strongest sexual potency and among all the quadrupeds is supposed to have the longest and hardest phallus. (Kott, 1988, pp 182/3)

Indeed, when Oberon and Titania first meet, they accuse each other of sexual infidelity. During the play they have to learn, as the other lovers do, that there is all the difference between love and being in love. One is true, the other illusion.

Dominating the scenes in the forest is Puck, who under Oberon's command, places the love-juice on the eyes of the lovers and transforms Bottom. So much of the cruelty of the play is due to his ministrations. Not that he is unsympathetic to the mischief he is causing but, as Harold F. Brooks says

He relishes topsy-turvydom itself

those things do best please me  
That befall prepos'trously

Usually he makes no account of the distresses from the comic confusion. His mistake over Lysander was not committed wilfully or maliciously, but none the less he enjoys its effect upon



the lovers:

so far am I glad it did sort  
That this their jangling I esteem a  
sport  
(Brooks, 1993, *Arden Edition*: p cix)

Puck was based on well-known folk-lore, the fairy's speech in Act 2 scene i details all the mischief that Puck is meant to cause, and throughout the play he adds the spice of mischief. His is the final word when he heightens the dream-like atmosphere by telling the audience that they, too, have been dreaming for

...this weak and idle theme  
No more yielding but a dream (Act 5 scene i)

So we have yet another dream to add to the dreams that are within the play - Bottom's dream: Titania's dream, which she comes to realize is false: Hermia's dream, which reveals that her love is not just romantic: the lovers' dream, which, though drug induced, makes them realize and recognize true love. The audience, too, has been dreaming. Illusion is what the theatre is about, but that illusion, that imagination that we have to use there, can teach us that life itself is not an illusion, and that love is not only romantic but an unselfish and unsparing emotion. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is, above all, it is contended, about the right way to love. Which means not treating people as chattels, not having illusions about them, not letting the law be administered cruelly but with compassion, about loving people for themselves. It needs Oberon/Shakespeare to teach us that.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

LILIAN BAYLIS THEATRE, 1993



from: *The Independent*, 14th April, 1993



The Century Theatre's production of this play was Stephen Unwin's first one for the company, and, in an interview with Georgina Brown, published in *The Independent*, 7th April 1993 he stated his aims:

Shakespeare is *not* our contemporary: he is a very good writer from another period...I want this to feel like a late 20th-century production of a play from 1594, which is also a great and popular work. And instead of denying that and saying it's actually about sex, I am saying embrace it...Of course you have to interpret, but you must resist facile, narrow interpretations.

There were thirteen members in the cast which made for some interesting doubling. Theseus and Hippolyta became Oberon and Titania: Philostrate doubled with Puck, Egeus became Peter Quince and, most interestingly, the Mechanicals became grave, disapproving Fairies. The question of how to play the fairies is one of the difficulties of the play. Victorian productions used myriads of children in tutus, a tradition which John Caird satirized ~~is~~ his 1989 production by giving them bovver boots and bedraggled tutus. This is a luxury that companies nowadays cannot afford, unless, like the RSC, you have access to local children upon whom you can draw. For a touring company, such as Century, lots of fairies is financially impossible. The law does not allow children to be in a theatre more than forty hours a month, and so three teams of children would have to be toured. To cast adults as the speaking fairies is the most economical way to cast them and ~~which~~ made an extra, funny resonance to Bottom's dream, as he sees his fellow citizens as part of his experiences in the wood.

Unwin, and his designer Bunny Christie, chose to set the play ~~is~~ a vivid green box with two entrances, up stage right and up stage left (as the Elizabethans had). In the back wall there was a vertical cupboard which could suddenly open to reveal Puck and in which he and Oberon could sit to watch the lovers. This was an eminently suitable set for a touring production which went to conventional theatres such as the Buxton Opera House, the small four-hundred seater theatre at Winchester and the even tinier Lilian Baylis theatre in London. In a Programme interview with Alison Humphrey, Unwin said that with this set

Much of the action, therefore, was thrown to the front of the stage, an advantage for contact with the audience.

and again

Characters describe the scene better than set-dressers could. It's the best way to tell the story, and the story's the heart of the play.

Unwin's intention was well carried out by his cast, and the text was well delivered by them. The floor was overlaid with wood, and for Titania's bower a sloping platform came up on which Titania and Bottom rather awkwardly lay: at one point, when they were not involved in the action, the fairies covered them with a large, white scarf. It looked rather tomb-like and the recumbent figures hampered the action in subsequent scenes, though, in a larger space and stage, this might have been less awkward. Titania's bower and what to do about it is one of the problems that the director has to



solve. In a large theatre which has flies it can be floated down when needed and up again when finished with. Peter Brook (1970) used a bower of scarlet ostrich feathers (and his fairies came down on trapezes): John Caird (1989) had an iron bedstead covered with cobwebs and flowers suspended in the middle-air space, which was lowered: Adrian Noble (1994/6) used umbrellas as a *leit motif* and the bower was a huge one suspended from the flies. These effects, of course, are not possible in most small space theatres which have no flies, so Christie's set was unable to have such a solution to the bower.

Christie and Unwin made no attempt to simulate a forest. Peter Brook (1970) had heavy wire coiled springs leap out from the corners to menace his lovers: Adrian Noble's (1994) was a surreal dream forest with doors that came up out of the floor, and a series of doors back-stage, which made for some very amusing business, but was completely unforest-like. The Victorians, of course (and even some productions as late as the 1950s) had 'real' forests, Beerbohm Tree even having live rabbits on stage!

The costumes in this production were Elizabethan, with Hippolyta in breeches, a fashion that was prevalent among the young *élégantes* of the period (cf Philip Stubbes: *Anatomy of Abuses*, 1582, *Hic Mulier* and *Haec Vir* pamphlets, both 1620). When the same actress played Titania she wore a copy of the Ditchley portrait.

The Mechanicals wore homespun clothes and when they became Fairies wore cream three-quarter length breeches, fitted jackets and ruffs. They were not given to larking around, but were grave and mysterious, and who, as Nick Curtis remarked in the *Evening Standard*, 13th April 1993, regarded their mistress's passion with undisguised distaste. The lovers wore black Elizabethan costumes: both the girls' dresses were

identical as were the men's, which made the mix-up between them very creditable.

The direction and acting throughout ~~was~~ uncomplicated: there were no obvious tricks or concepts. As Paul Taylor wrote

[Unwin] communicates Shakespeare's comedy with a freshness that does not depend on some novel, distorting 'concept', and with an uncluttered clarity that shows how mistaken it is to equate simplicity with lack of sophistication. (*The Independent*: 14th April, 1993)

Puck was played as a street-wise cockney lad, which was at odds with the lyrical quality of the rest of the play and he created confusion in the forest by throwing high-pitched, rather frighteningly noisy caps. This noise created tension and fear, perhaps, in a small space, the caps were too rowdy and , maybe, dangerous. The verse was well-spoken, with due regard for the varying metres. The interval came at Puck's 'All shall be well' (Act 3 scene ii).

As can be seen from the Tour List, ~~the~~ most of the other theatres in which this production played were all fairly large proscenium theatres and the Lilian Baylis Theatre itself is more like a proscenium arch theatre than the other venues chosen for this thesis. The audience is raised up on tiers and, except for the front row, is not on the same level as the stage: nor are there different playing areas reached by balconies, a facility enjoyed both in *The Other Place* and *The Swan*, both of which have



galleries. Nonetheless, the actors, as Unwin said, did have an awareness and contact with the audience in their playing. This was particularly so with Puck, who played his part almost as if he were a stand-up comic or a comedian in a pantomime, and he very much involved the audience in his trickery with knowing glances and a sense of mockery. The Mechanicals, led by a softer, less braggart Bottom (Jeremy Swift) than usual were gently funny and when they presented their play, it was done, not only to the Court, but to the audience as well, which opened out the last act to embrace the whole theatre. The end had a shift from the practical to the enchanted that was well done and greatly helped by the haunting music of Corin Buckeridge, which had given the right sort of atmosphere throughout in an unobtrusive way. There was no dancing in this production, and indeed, the dance of reconciliation between Titania and Oberon was omitted. Titania's large farthingale prevented it, as there simply would not have been room for such a dance on this stage in that costume. The fairies, too, did not dance, but their movements were softer and slightly trembling, in contrast to their strong movements as their human counterparts.

Stephen Unwin's intention was to present a production with a modern interpretation but which, also, had a strong connection with the Elizabethans. As he said in an interview printed in the programme

Shakespeare's theatre was able without self-consciousness to stand parables and realism side-by-side on the same stage...Our own production's historical quoting works that way too. There's no fun in designing Elizabethan down to the last detail...we are modern artists, but we can quote historical images.

In this production he succeeded in realizing a very entertaining and satisfying production of this play which adapted itself to a small space admirably. The story was well told, with clarity and the characters were represented truthfully. To quote Unwin again

You could have lots of what I call 'shouting-acting'...and Lysander playing with a Nintendo kit, but that's the way to get the audience bored. They'll be waiting for the Nintendo to come back and the verse just gets in the way. (*The Independent*: 7th April, 1993)

There certainly was no 'shouting-acting' in this production and it would have been totally out of place for there to be any. At times the action looked a little cramped by the space, for the theatre is tiny and there was little room for extraneous movement, particularly as Unwin and his designer used a great deal of space for the bower, which was there throughout scenes in which neither Titania nor Bottom actually appeared. The stage was very crowded when all the fairies were on it, and in the last scene. The actors, too, had to contain their acting in this space, but they did reveal the text in an insightful way, though the darker themes of the play were not apparent. As Nick Curtis wrote

Lines ring with new or forgotten meaning, illuminating the many personal shadings that Shakespeare brought to this tale of love...(Evening Standard: 13th April, 1993)



or as Unwin , himself, put it

This *Dream* is for audiences who are saying what's the story, not how's the play being done. (Programme Interview)

a concept which suited the space in which the writer witnessed it, as the attention was thrown onto the verse and the story without much distraction in the way of concept or effects, which were of the simplest. The production upheld one of the contentions of this thesis - that small space Shakespeare focuses the audience's attention on the text and that effects are not necessary to a realization of the play.

'The Georgian Film Actors' Studio has no wings and no curtain, and we perform on these bare boards as on a scaffold' so wrote Mikhail Tumanishvili in the programme to the Barbican presentation in the Pit of this company's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which was part of the EVERYBODY'S SHAKESPEARE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL October/November 1994. The play was rehearsed while Tbilisi was undergoing a civil war, and the director said

We decided to do a production that was cheerful and full of vitality; it is our way of saying we don't accept violence and war...When we are desperately depressed we need our dreams. We need to relax in a wonderful dream which is

full of life, fantasy and, most importantly, love. Only love can save the world and save our dreams. (Publicity handout)

The Pit is a square room in which the audience sits in tiers on three sides (generally) overlooking the playing area. The Georgians had a cloth which was spattered with paint and which covered the back wall. In front was an arrangement of translucent screens, also spattered with paint and about five feet high. On the tiled floor similar panels were placed. These were moved around in the course of the action by girls dressed in leotards with tree markings on them. By turn the girls and the panels became Titania's Bower, menacing trees in the forest, or just standing around re-acting to the dialogue. In addition, fairies, dressed in leaf-spattered costumes jumped around the forest, again re-acting to the events and generally distracting from the action. The play was not according to Shakespeare's text throughout. At the end Oberon spoke Prospero's 'We are such stuff as dreams are made of' (there was no explanation given of this in any of the notes supplied by the Director) and the blessing of the house was omitted (for Director's summary of the plot as printed in the Programme see Appendix 9)

The play was spoken in Georgian, which was translated by sur-titles at the back of the stage. Russian acting is more vigorous and physical than that generally seen on the English stage, and this led to what a British audience would deem over-acting. When the Mechanicals did the Pyramus and Thisbe play, even more 'mugging' took place. One missed, too, the comments made by the Athenians in this scene. The characterizations were not in a traditional line either. Bottom was played by a thin, eager young man and Flute by a fat, middle-aged



man. Lysander and Demetrius were real boobies, and this upset the balance of the play as no girl would really risk what Hermia and Helena did to become their wives. Demetrius particularly was a caricature - with a false nose and rouged cheeks.

The production was played swiftly, with eclectic music which ranged from Mendelssohn through Wagner to modern pop, and the play ran for an hour and fifty minutes without a break. Although some of the effects with the moving screens were beautiful this was not a production that would seem to specifically fit a small space. The Pit is not so accommodating as some small spaces in exits and entrance, but the Georgians did not make use of the variety available and their moving screens would have looked far more effective on a larger stage with a proscenium arch and a more varied lighting. In their own 'scaffold' theatre, of course, they may have been more prominent. Costumes and props (such as the ass's head) were all conventional. The sudden use of a telephone for Helena to tell Demetrius of Hermia's flight, and the telephone used by Oberon and Puck, was irritating and added nothing to the play. The exuberance of the playing did communicate a sense of jollity to the audience and there was much laughter, but the essential magic was missing, and the style of acting was more suited to a larger space. One of the joys of playing in a small space is to be able to act subtlety as many actors testify (see Jackson and Smallwood 1988 and 1993, *inter alia*). The Georgians were very upfront and they seemed to be unable to interact with an audience so close. This was extrovert playing at its worst: there was no attempt at embracing the audience in a quiet way. [note:as there was little critical response in the newspapers to this production these opinions can not be substantiated by them]

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

THE PIT, 1994



from: The Programme



These two productions were very dissimilar. Unwin's, which had not originally been conceived for a small space, fitted into it admirably, really told the story well, embraced the audience, and played the text simply, as it might have been spoken on a bare stage in 1594. The Georgians' production, planned and originally acted in a small space, was so over-acted and over produced with its effects and 'busy' movements which distracted the audience's attention from the text. Unwin asked the audience to become involved, use its collective imagination, and re-create the scenes played on an almost bare stage: the Georgians' diverted the audience's attention away from the text to be 'amusing'. If the essence of small space productions should be, as this thesis contends, to put the attention on the text, engage the audience and make them use their imaginations, and for the actors to be able to act with subtlety and embrace the audience, then Unwin succeeded and Tumanishvili failed.

# HAMLET

THE TOM PATTERSON THEATRE

STRATFORD, ONTARIO

Summer, 1994

DIRECTOR Richard Monette

DESIGNER Debra Hanson

HAMLET Stephen Ouimette

and also

THE ENGLISH TOURING THEATRE

THE DONMAR WAREHOUSE, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON

Autumn 1993

part of a Tour which included Crewe, Oxford, Worthing,  
Whitley Bay, Buxton, Winchester, and Dartford.

DIRECTOR Stephen Unwin

DESIGNER Bunny Christie



Aristotle's definition of a tragedy is that it should be

...a representation, not of man, but of action and life, of happiness and unhappiness - and happiness and unhappiness are bound up with action.

The purpose of living is an end which is a kind of activity, not quality; it is their characters, indeed, that make men what they are, but it is by reason of their actions that they are happy or the reverse. (Aristotle: pp 39/40)

*Hamlet* has these Aristotelian qualities, which Shakespeare had never yet fully realised ~~is~~ a tragedy. The action and the character of the hero are co-mingled, the plot being the life-blood which feeds and nourishes the hero, a philosopher-prince whose thoughts and actions are expressed in poetry and prose of the highest order. In this play, too, Shakespeare has a maturity of diction, where the character has his or her own specific way of speaking, his own vocabulary. Spectacle and stage effects, other Aristotelian qualities are there in plenty. Above all Shakespeare created a character whose fascination has lasted nearly four hundred years and who can be interpreted by actors and readers in so many various ways. He is a prince to whom Fortune has not been kind: he makes discoveries that amaze and appall him: he seems powerless to control events which finally overcome him. Shakespeare created, not a passive, suffering icon, but a living, recognizable philosopher-prince whose personality beguiles and

fascinates. As Nicholas Grene states

We are not able confidently to diagnose Hamlet as neurotic, to place his mental condition as pathological, because his diseased and death-obsessed imagination of Denmark as a prison makes it a prison for us too. Hamlet's self-nausea authenticates a tragic universe.  
(Grene, 1992, p 285)

John Dover Wilson and other critics have concluded that his melancholy, his nausea, is caused by sexual disgust at his mother's behaviour in committing incest. Even before he sees the Ghost, in his first soliloquy

O that this too too sullied flesh (Act 1: scene 1)

he expresses both his disgust and his melancholy. The task laid upon him by the Ghost overwhelms him, for, not only has his uncle Claudius married his mother Gertrude, horrible enough in itself to Hamlet, but Claudius has also committed murder and then, opportunistically, seized the throne in Hamlet's own absence. To bear these events is enough, but then to have the task of killing Claudius in revenge is, seemingly, impossible. To kill a king on the word of a Ghost would not seem to be the action of a reasonable man - the explanation given by Claudius as to the cause of Old Hamlet's death has been accepted, and he is king by election and crowning. To kill Claudius would be treason and lead to his own shameful death. There is no possible action he can take but only wait and hope that Claudius will betray himself. Hamlet does not lack courage, he would not be a hero if he did. He faces the Ghost with



daring, and he accepts his own death, both hero-like attributes. Hamlet can be ruthless - he despatches Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths without remorse: when he thinks he is in danger in Gertrude's closet he acts quickly and swiftly. He realizes that, in honour, he has to revenge his father's murder, but he is reluctant because the circumstances are not propitious. His character is flawed, but not with procrastination or reluctance.

Hamlet says of himself that he is

very proud, revengeful, ambitious (Act 3: scene 1)

which are, it is submitted, qualities that he undoubtedly had, but which most interpreters of the part generally ignore. It can be argued that, when he said these words, Hamlet was play-acting, was pretending madness for the benefit of the listening King and Polonius. But the qualities are in him. For example, he has a proper pride in himself as a prince. He expects to be treated as such, though to real underlings - the soldiers and the Players - he is always courteous, but keeps his distance from them. To Laertes he makes a gracious apology ~~to him~~ when he is in the wrong. He is charming to his social inferiors but one has the feeling that they have to know their place as the scene with Polonius indicates. He acts always as a Prince who knows that matters of state have to be considered.

Revengeful, the second attribute that Hamlet accuses himself of is apparent. He has the task of revenging his father. Although he cannot find a way to take that revenge it is always on his mind. As Harold Jenkins says

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare presents a revenger who is both ruthless and reluctant. As a revenger he must act, on behalf of outraged virtue, to restore a violated order, set right what is 'out of joint'. (*Arden Edition*, 1993, p 156)

Ambition, the third attribute, is also apparent, as he considers that he is the rightful King of Denmark. He tells Rosencrantz and Guildenstern that a cause of his melancholy is that he lacks preferment and he accuses Claudius of popping between the election and his hopes. He also despises Claudius's intellect, and his morals, blaming him for Gertrude's sexual impropriety. But above the pride, revengefulness and ambition, there is a peculiar charm about Hamlet. That Hamlet should have some distasteful characteristics mixed in with his more attractive ones only shows what an extraordinary observant and truthful playwright Shakespeare was. Audiences are captivated - Shakespeare has placed 'springes to catch woodcocks' indeed.

*Hamlet* is not, of course, only about the Prince. As Aristotle said, plot is the most important element in tragedy. Shakespeare's plots are always intriguing, a story well told, and *Hamlet* is no exception. It is a supremely well-crafted play which moves in three great arcs: from a beginning which explains the events that have happened before the play begins, and which presents Hamlet with his task and dilemma. This section ends at

.....the Play's the thing  
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.  
(Act2 scene ii)



The second, swift arc, full of incident, shows what happens between Ophelia and Hamlet: the Play scene and the consequences of that. At the end of the movement it seems that all is lost with Hamlet - he is going to England, and to his death. The last act concerns Ophelia's madness, Hamlet's return and the fatal ending. There is a symmetry to the play in the way that the three court scenes - the opening council scene, the play scene and the final scene - where Hamlet and Claudius confront each other mark the beginning, middle and end of the play.

For *Hamlet* is a play about the court and about politics where the 'inner and outer interchange and interpenetrate' (Greene, 1992, p 285). The background of the action is war - Claudius in his first speech talks of the 'warlike' state and the first business of the scene is concerned with the embassy to Norway to prevent the impending war. The return of the ambassadors with peace and the request for Fortinbras to have safe passage to pursue his war against the Polak, occurs towards the end of the first movement, while Fortinbras is a real presence in the middle and last sections. One of the causes of Hamlet's melancholy is his frustrated ambition, and Claudius's reasons for keeping Hamlet in Denmark are political. Hamlet is popular with the people. He could, out of his dissatisfaction, create public sympathy and cause a rebellion. Laertes, with far less reason, and with no royal blood actually does so. Claudius has to have Hamlet under his eye and keeping. After Hamlet's extreme rudeness and threatening behaviour in the Play scene it is still difficult for Claudius to proceed against Hamlet just because he is so well beloved by the people and his mother. The killing of Polonius gives Claudius his chance and he takes the expedient, political action of despatching Hamlet abroad on a seemingly honorable mission. If Hamlet and Claudius

had not been what they are, important members of a reigning family, then the play would not be what it is. Ordinary fathers may get murdered and ordinary sons may revenge them, but the State is not affected. In *Hamlet* they are, and the consequence that Claudius was trying to prevent, the occupation of Denmark by Norway, becomes a reality at the conclusion of the play.

The other quality that sets *Hamlet* apart is its language, both prose and poetry. As Stanley Wells writes

The prose has a similar lyrical quality. It is as flexible an instrument of expression as the verse, sometimes capturing the terse utterances of day-to-day speech, but at other times written with consummate artistry... (Wells, 1994, p 202)

and as Wells goes on to say

Part of the play's appeal lies in the sheer sensuous pleasure of the way it is written. (Wells, 1994, p 202)

Muriel Bradbrook comments on the sheer range of the expressive language, saying,

*Hamlet* encompasses every register, from grand soliloquy to brutally colloquial wit, exploiting the oral tradition of composition; the contrast of different



'voices' is emphasized by Hamlet himself...and each would make its special appeal to one or other temperament in the audience. (Bradbrook, 1980, p 151)

So, as Bradbrook says, the emotions displayed in the sensuous language, give pleasure in themselves.

Indeed, there is something for everyone in this play, which, doubtless, accounts for its instant and continuing popularity. To quote from Nicholas Grene again, like all Shakespeare's tragedies *Hamlet* succeeds because

...we have identified with them [the tragic heroes] emotionally and feel for their destruction, physical and moral, but because to identify with them was to share the play's deepest imaginative apprehension of the world, (Grene, 1992, p 285)

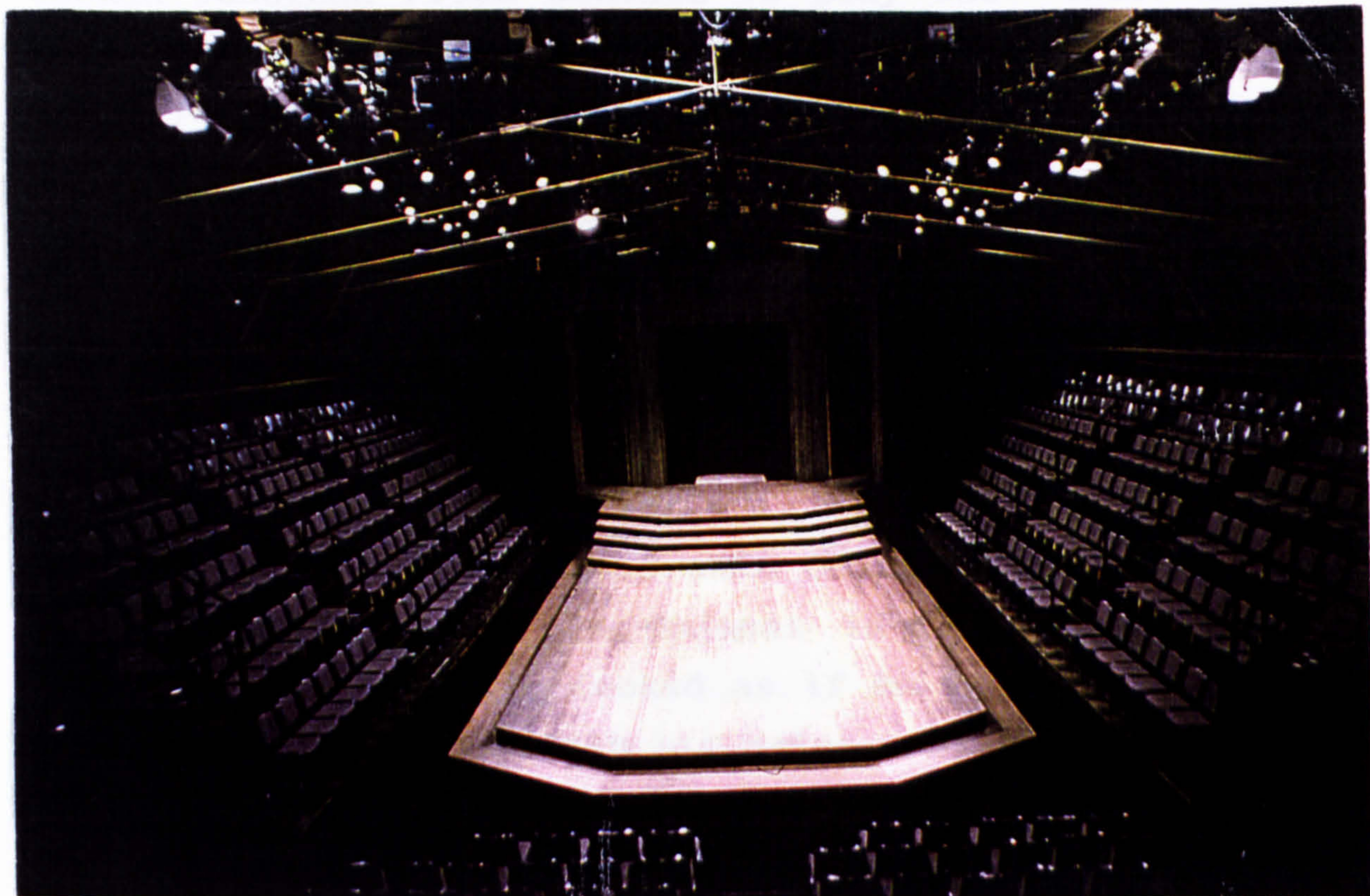
Although the pleasures in the play are great, a production does present problems for the director and cast. *Hamlet* is set in a closed space, the confines of the court, and the audience can be invited to participate in that court life or to become spectators of a play. The director has, then, to decide how much to invite his audience in, and a small space can aid him in this as, by his groupings of the actors, he can include them. Actors can talk quietly to the audience, who sit around the stage not centrally on it, by using entrances and exits through the audience. *Hamlet*



## TOM PATTERSON THEATRE, ONTARIO

Acting Area: 4.2 metres by 5.7 metres

Capacity: 490



courtesy of The Stratford Theatre



though is also an interior play as it exploits the innermost mind of a man. How much of Hamlet's dilemma is imaginary, how mad is he? These are important questions which actor and director have to solve. Is the Ghost real? Certainly he is seen by the soldiers and Horatio, though not by Gertrude (perhaps her sin prevents it). Horatio's description is very exact, though Jonathan Price decided to play the Ghost as a figment of Hamlet's imagination, most directors prefer a solid presence. Hamlet's madness is a question of quality - how far does the actor go? There are as many variations as there are Hamlets. Roger Rees's (1984/5) was stunned and deeply shocked at his father's death and (at Stratford, at least, the performance changed considerably by the time it reached London) seemed to have a glass wall round him, which made him unable to communicate and relate rationally to those around him: Mark Rylance (1989) plunged into Oedipal madness, lying in a foetal position in pyjamas in several scenes. Kenneth Branagh (1994) looked as if he had just come in from a friendly fight with his mates, while both Michael Pennington (1980/1) and Ralph Fiennes (1995) emphasized the intellectual qualities of the Prince, Pennington in an introverted way, Fiennes as though thoughts were bursting out from him. These are indications how actors have tackled this problem and how variously the part can be interpreted. That Hamlet behaves impertinently to Polonius, unkindly to Ophelia (though she is the one to have jilted him), and threateningly to Claudius is all in the text - how he does this is up to the actor. That Hamlet is quick tempered and can be easily inflamed is evident - emphasis is all when making choices about a part, and where the play is to be presented is one of the variants that has to enter the actor's calculations. In a small space a Hamlet can be more gentle, less declamatory and rhetorical than if he had to energize a large space between him and the furthest member of the audience, though by the intensity of his acting he can still convey all the emotions in a more

distilled way.

*Hamlet* is a long play - approaching four hours if the entire text, combining both Q2 with First Folio is played (for discussion on text see *Oxford Edition: Complete Works 1992*). So much directorial cutting generally takes place to make a comfortable three or so hours, and the play is divided into two acts. Of the twenty-six productions that the writer has seen only one has followed the three act construction in which the play seems to fall naturally. That production was in 1944, when two intervals were normal in the theatre: directed by Tyrone Guthrie with Michael Benthall it was notorious for cutting the first scene altogether and for having the ballet dancer, Robert Helpmann in the lead. The first act ended at the end of the soliloquy 'O what a rogue and peasant slave am I', while the second act finished with Hamlet's departure to England. Many directors now break the play at this juncture only, making for a very long first act, but the two directors discussed under differed.

The overall task of the director, in this most Renaissance of plays, is to convey the brilliance of the verse and prose, and to tell the story for the exciting adventure that it is. It needs a certain grandeur, it needs good verse-speaking: it needs to be like a kaleidoscope, changing its mood from courtliness to bawdiness, from melancholia to comedy, from the profound to the trivial, from joyfulness to a tragedy that touches with pity and terror. In a small space these elements have to be crafted to energize that space, and because of the grand sweep of the play, care has to be taken that this is not diminished but strengthened, something that with skill adds to the excitement of the play, because it has been concentrated and made the audience concentrate more deeply.



The Tom Patterson Theatre stands on the banks of the river Avon in Stratford, Ontario, Canada. Sitting in it is rather like being inside a large, up-turned sailing boat, with wooden ribs rising above you. It has a thrust stage jutting into the audience, who sit on three sides of it in tiers. On the right and left sides of Row A middle are entrances used by both audience and players, who mount three steps to get onto the stage. At the back is a brick wall also with entrances to the right and left. The area of the stage is altered from time to time, but the long, narrow structure is kept. In the winter the stage is dismantled and the building returns to its use as a badminton hall. For this production of *Hamlet* the designer, Debra Hanson, had built four steps which stretched along the stage at the back. A wooden wall had been constructed above them angled at each side to make entrances. The centre back could also be opened to expose the brick wall for the outdoor scenes, and to make a recess. In some scenes (the Closet scene for example) soft, cream muslin curtains were used in the doorways to soften the effect. Chairs, which were rearranged by a very competent stage management team, were modern in design, made of wood and black metal. There were two tables which were brought on as required, one was used for Polonius, the other, smaller one, was used in the Closet scene. The effect was sombre, rather puritanical, and emphasised that life in this court was lived in public. The length of the stage was effectively deployed to give a feeling of a lack of privacy, as was also shown by the way the courtiers suddenly appeared and, often, rushed diagonally off the stage, through one of the entrances. The Tom Patterson is the smallest of the Stratford, Ontario theatres. As Helen Hewitt wrote in *The Listowel Banner*, 8th June, 1994, the theatre is

...small enough, intimate enough, that no actor need become shrill or break the illusion with exaggerated gesture or voice production.

The costumes were generally grey in colour, and of no particular period; neither did they indicate character, and class only rudimentarily. As the intention of the director, Richard Monette, was to concentrate on the text, these costumes were sufficiently neutral not to be distracting. The men wore grey trousers with either heavy jerseys (for soldiers) or crushed velvet tunics (for courtiers). The waiting women were in high-waisted dresses of the same velvet. The same style was used for Gertrude, who had three changes, grey, red (for the Play scene) and black (end of play). Ophelia was in ivory. The principal men wore suits, except for Claudius, who wore a grey military uniform, and Horatio who wore a leather jacket. Hamlet wore a black shirt and trousers. The players were in russet tones when in their ordinary clothes and used black and red for the Play scene. Donal O'Connor of the *Beacon Herald*, 3rd June, 1994 said that the production 'is free of elaborate costuming and other so-called "production values", and depends for its success almost entirely on the superb handling of Shakespeare's text.' The music, by Louis Appelbaum was both dramatic and spare but did underline the most significant moments effectively.

As Canadian Trade Union practice decrees, performances in Canada's theatres must not last longer than three hours or else everyone goes into double time, so the text of *Hamlet* had to be extensively cut. The director, Richard Monette, decided to leave out all the political events as he said (in interview with writer,



HAMLET

TOM PATTERSON THEATRE, ONTARIO



rehearsal picture courtesy of The Stratford Festival

15th July, 1994) that he had never seen these scenes played effectively on the stage. He saw *Hamlet* as a domestic tragedy only, not a political one, and he felt this approach was more appropriate for the smaller space as well. This meant the loss of Fortinbras and his troops and the soliloquy 'How all occasions do inform against me': Cornelius, Voltimand and the Ambassadors were also cut. Fortinbras's speeches in the last scene were also cut, or given to Horatio, who, at the end, held the crown of Denmark high above Hamlet. The real, political point that Claudius's work, to keep Denmark free from Norway's domination, was lost. Reynaldo's scene with Polonius was kept as Monette said that this showed what sort of court Claudius had created. Monette's other reasons for cutting the political scenes was that he thought that they were a distraction from the main existential and psychological themes which interested him more. 'To be or not to be' 'is the key to the whole play as it deals with death, religion and ghosts' he asserted.

Monette did not want an extravagant production in that space and also because his cast included some of Canada's best actors, mixed with some excellent younger members. He wanted to concentrate on the verse.

I had a vision of the play which would be unencumbered by a lot of production values...You spend a lot of time when you produce a play getting all the elements of it right. I wanted to spend more time with the actors on discovering the text. (*Beacon Herald Stratford Festival Supplement: 1994: p F-3*)

Other changes in text meant that 'To be or not to be'



was said during the Fishmonger scene after 'What's my life, what's my life'. This led to an awkward piece of production which could only have occurred in this thrust stage type of theatre. Polonius stepped off down stage right, to the level of the audience, and stood there, looking downwards, while Hamlet said the speech illuminated by a spotlight. The reason for this, Monette said, was, that when he was an actor playing Hamlet, he had felt that the soliloquy belonged there rather than before the Nunnery scene. (In Q1 the Nunnery scene is contained within the scene where it is plotted to loose Ophelia and before the Players' entrance, and Monette thought that this gave him the authority to make this change). The spotlight was distracting, as instead of Hamlet taking the audience into his confidence he became isolated. Soliloquies, even on a proscenium arch stage, are great opportunities to take an audience into an actor's confidence. On a thrust or small space stage the opportunity is even greater because of the nearness of actor to audience, and it was an opportunity lost at this point. Other transpositions were Hamlet and Horatio discussing the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern before Ophelia's funeral. The two scenes where Claudius and Laertes plot to kill Hamlet were joined together and played at Ophelia's graveside, as Monette thought that this was 'real smart'.

The problem as to whether Hamlet hears the plot to loose Ophelia to him is solved by playing on a long thrust stage. The plotters were well downstage, and Hamlet entered up stage well away from them, but able to see that something was afoot. There was no dumb show, so the question as to why the King sat through two showings of poisoning was not explained (though, perhaps, it is not the poisoning that threatens him but the fact that it is the 'nephew' to the King that perpetrates it that frightens him).

Directing *Hamlet* in a small space really posed no problems, Monette said. The advantages were that he was able, as he wanted, to have the verse spoken naturalistically and intimately to the audience. Monette thinks that audiences nowadays are used to quieter speaking of text because of television and films. He said

A modern audience is more comfortable with natural speaking: as *Hamlet* is a domestic play the speaking sound is in relation to the tone, space, production and aesthetic values of this production.  
(Interview with author: 1994)

One regret that Monette did have was that he could not have more people in the Court scenes, and more soldiers also. The budget (which is confidential) would not allow for this as it is a restricted one for this space. The contrast ~~with~~ this very plain production with the really sumptuous production values in the Festival Theatre itself, was very noticeable. The cast was restricted to sixteen speaking members: the Ghost and the Gravedigger (William Hutt) were doubled as was Reynaldo and the Player Queen (Duncan Ollerenshaw): Player Prologue and Osric (David Jansen) and Marcellus with the Priest were other doubles. All the young men played courtiers and soldiers as required and, in addition, there were three waiting-women for Gertrude. The play had one interval, breaking at

.....The play's the thing  
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.  
(Act 2 scene ii)



One of the striking things about this production which showed Monette's skill in using this long stage was the way that the actors would sweep across the stage from the back, right down the length and out of the entrances through Row A. This allowed for great pace in acting as the dialogue was spoken as the actors moved (for instance, in some of the scenes with Polonius when he and the King were discussing Hamlet). These exits were also used to create confusion after the Play scene, the Court rushing away through these exits, which was exciting to the audience as the frightened feeling of the actors was transmitted to it. Another skilful use of the space was the scene where Claudius tries to repent. The actor (Peter Donaldson) came right down stage to kneel and Hamlet (Stephen Ouimette) came in up stage. He made his speech then, as Claudius rose, smote an iron tree left behind by the Players and disappeared quickly. Claudius turned, realizing that someone had been there, but unable to know who. In a picture frame or apron stage this piece of business, I submit, would not have worked so well. On this stage the feeling of an uncorridored castle was created, for there was never any sense of rooms in this location. The place was open for all to see and hear. There was no real privacy in this court: concealment, even in private moments became a luxury.

Monette's desire to focus the interest of the text was somewhat marred by the verse-speaking. There is something about the cadence of normal Canadian speech which seems to grate against the iambic pentameter, though in fairness to Monette it must be said that he intends to hold verse-speaking classes for his company in future. Again and again accents hit the wrong places and there was no steady, underlying beat. Lines, too, were broken in the wrong places and there was no understanding of the caesura. Canadian critics, however,

did not seem to worry about this. Indeed James Coulborn said

Even in this Spartan setting his  
[Shakespeare's] words take wing.  
(*Toronto Sun*: 3rd June, 1994)

The Tom Patterson Theatre is a space that is made for instant intimacy and rapport with an audience, where really intimate verse-speaking has a telling effect. Monette's actors were aware of this possibility, but there was little direct approach to the audience, and in spotlighting Hamlet when he could talk directly, Monette failed to use one of the most potent effects he could have used. Where the production scored and used the space well was in creating lack of privacy, and in telling the story swiftly and economically. Jamie Portman wrote

One of the virtues of Monette's production is the clarity of its narrative line and the meticulous defining of certain key situations.  
(*Windsor Star*: 3rd June, 1994)

and in the use of this space with its long stage which has an audience wrapped round it helping to draw the audience into the action.

Whereas Monette's production was made for a thrust stage, Stephen Unwin's *Hamlet* was conceived as a touring production, which finished its run in the tiny Donmar



theatre in London. Unwin has the aim of bringing 'together actors, directors, designers and production staff of the highest national standards' so that its productions of 'great plays will be presented with clarity, elegance and detail' (Programme note, *Hamlet*, 1993). Most of the theatres in which the Company acts are proscenium arch ones, such as the Lyceum, Crewe, its home theatre, and The Playhouse, Oxford. Unwin and his designer for this play, Bunnie Christie, have devised an ingenious way of presenting them. A free-standing back wall is devised with masking flats at each side of the stage and entrances up stage right and left. They have used this design for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Beaux' Strategem*, both parts of *Henry IV* (though this did fly in some panels) and for this production of *Hamlet*. This set had a white back wall with a slash two-thirds of the way up it which contained lights which changed colour to suit the mood of the scene. The floor was wooden and sloped upwards towards the back. There were only two entrances, up stage right and upstage left. The audience at the Donmar (around 250) sat on three sides, the rows in front being the longest, the side rows being only ten seats long, with the stage jutting out. There are two galleries which are also on three sides. This stage fitted Unwin's conception of how to present an Elizabethan play to a modern audience. Writing in the Programme he said

When preparing a production of a Shakespeare play, we are confronted with a simple but powerful contradiction. On the one hand we know that the play was written almost four hundred years ago, in an entirely different world with different social structures, religious beliefs and so on. On the other hand we know that we are doing a play now, in our modern society, with its new technology

## THE DONMAR THEATRE, LONDON

Capacity: 210 when in Courtyard formation



The Donmar refused to give any information about the theatre or to provide plans or photographs. It is estimated that the Acting Area is around 9 metres by 9.5 metres



and social forms. And so the question we have to ask is: how can we combine a thorough understanding of Shakespeare's historical period, with an aesthetic sensibility shaped by a modern world? Shakespeare isn't our contemporary, but we are presenting his play to our own contemporaries who have their own contemporary perspectives. This production of *Hamlet* is an attempt to express this contradiction.

This creed, of course, serves for all theatres in which his productions are presented, but it seems to work well in a small space. As John Peter wrote

[Stephen Unwin's production has] the determination that Shakespeare should be allowed to set his own agenda and create his own surprises. There are hardly any props. The plain pine floor slopes slightly towards the audience...You get the sense, essential to modern Shakespeare, that the past is addressing the present on equal terms. (*Sunday Times*: 3rd October, 1993)

Malcolm Rutherford, almost the only critic who related the production to the space said of Alan Cummings who played Hamlet that

He also has a marvellous talent of appealing directly to the audience... There is a style to Unwin's direction which runs throughout. When Pip

Donaghy's Claudius comes to his own soliloquy, he has the same technique. The Donmar Warehouse is a wonderful place to do this. (*Financial Times* : 13th November, 1993)

Paul Taylor, though, in *The Independent*, 13th November, 1993, thought this was a disadvantage as Cummings seemed to

play so directly to the audience, and rarely seems to be communing with himself

This, of course, asks the question of what soliloquies are for. Are they a character communing with himself or are they occasions for letting the audience know what the character is thinking, or both? It is for the actor and director to decide, but, it is submitted, a small space theatre is a place where the actor can address the audience as if it were being taken into his confidence more easily, because the two are in touching distance.

A cast of thirteen played all parts: Marcellus/Voltimand/Captain and Priest were played by William Key: Francisco/Player Queen/2nd Gravedigger and Osiric being played by Andrew Ballington: Ghost/Player King/ First Gravedigger were Ric Morgan, while Rosencrantz (Alexander Nash) also played an Ambassador while Guildenstern (David Joyce) doubled Fortinbras. This was a convenient number for touring, and economic.

Taking his inspiration from the drawing attributed to Henry Peachum of a performance of *Titus Andronicus* in



HAMLET

THE DONMAR, LONDON



from: *The Sunday Times*, 21st November, 1993



which Roman dress was combined with Elizabethan dress, Unwin and his designer combined modern and Elizabethan costume. Gertrude, Ophelia and Claudius were in full Elizabethan costume, while Hamlet changed from Elizabethan to modern, wearing in the 'mad' scenes Lycra shorts and a T-shirt. Other members of the cast wore ruffs with modern dress, while the Players were the most modern, having elements of punk in their clothes: they also had a ghetto-blaster and used microphones. Hamlet and Horatio plugged in a TV set to watch Fortinbras and his troops. For formal occasions, such as the Play scene, branched candelabra set at each corner cast great shadows, which seemed to increase the number of people at court. A carpet was set with a bench on it for Gertrude and Claudius. There was a screen behind which Polonius hid in the Closet scene. Unwin justified the combination of Elizabethan and modern by saying

...for us, *Hamlet* is both a play about the intricacies of Elizabethan culture and society, and a work which poses some of the great questions that human beings are still asking themselves, nearly four hundred years after the play was written.  
(Programme Notes)

The contradictions in the style of the production

...echo some of those deeper social, political and psychological contradictions expressed in Shakespeare's great masterpiece.

The world is constantly changing - it is



important for drama to show how.  
(Programme Notes)

This *Hamlet* played a very full text (three-and-three-quarter hours) most of the cuts being just line cuts. The cast was given unpunctuated texts, as Unwin considers that punctuation is interpretation and he likes the actors to supply their own (interview with Kate Kellaway, *Observer*, 24th October, 1993). The interval was taken after the soliloquy ''Tis now the witching time of night' which broke the action of the great second sweep of the play, but, it must be said that the actors picked the speed up again very quickly. Much of the political framework was kept, giving a depth to the production that was lacking in the Canadian one.

As has been said, this was a touring production which was first presented at the Company's home theatre, the Lyceum, Crewe. Stephen Unwin declined to be interviewed or to answer questions, or to let the writer see Press Cuttings, for both this and his production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* but there is no doubt but that the production fitted well into the Donmar. The actors had re-thought the production so that there was a rapport between them and the audience in that they addressed the audience in a way that would not have been possible from a picture frame stage. This sharing of thought with the audience is what is needed in a small space. In the treatment of the Ghost, too, both directors chose a natural approach, that is the Ghost appeared as real person. In a larger theatre it would have been possible to surround the Ghost with trick lighting and dry ice (impossible to use in a small space as the audience would choke). Neither was it possible to use gauzes or lifts. But, nonetheless, both Ghosts appeared very martial and effective.

Where both productions fell down was in the interpretation of Hamlet. Though Cummings got good notices, there was in both his and Ouimette's

performance a lack of princely dignity. This was, of course, nothing to do with the space, though in Cummings's case the very nearness of him to his audience magnified the undoubted sopiness of his playing. The Canadian production used the very long stage to advantage, sweeping the cast across it, while the Donmar production gave the effect of a very closed society, something that would have been lost when playing in a larger theatre. A small space *Hamlet* should be set in an autocratic and aristocratic court, or else much of the tragedy is trivialised. It does not need elaborate scenery to convey this, the candelabra in the Unwin production gave the illusion of richness as did Claudius's and Gertrude's costumes. Elaborate scenery can be distracting as in Adrian Noble's 1992/3 production with a surreal set by Bob Crowley, which puzzled members of the audience (Meeting of the Friends of the RSC with Joanne Pearce, 1993).

Louise Doughty in the *Mail on Sunday*, 21st November, 1993, said that the proximity of the action on the Donmar's small stage added to the emotion of the acting and finished her notice by writing

Suffice to say, this is an excellent example of how much is achievable with minimal design, superb acting talent, and Shakespeare's best poetry.

Jane Edwardes in *Time Out*, 17th November, 1993 thought that the intimacy of the Donmar let Unwin exploit the

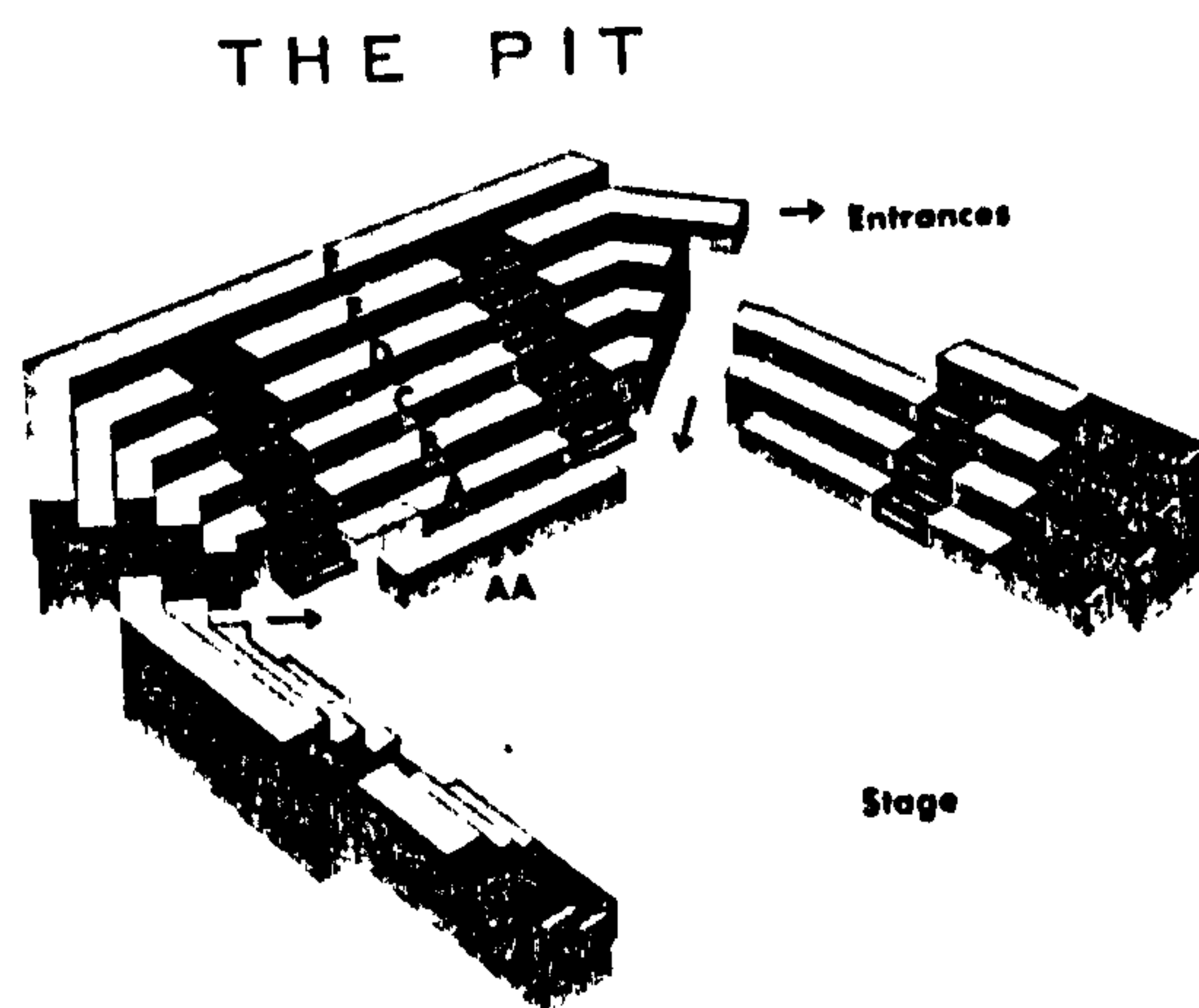


THE PIT, THE BARBICAN, LONDON.

Acting Area: courtyard: 9 metres by 7 metres

in the round: 7 metres by 7 metres

Capacity: circa 400 according to arrangement of seats



from: the Royal Shakespeare Company's booking programme

contact with the audience while Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 16th November, 1993, praised the production as a good chamber one. These opinions, from such diverse critics, praise the essential elements of a good small space production - simplicity, rapport with the audience and, above all, focus on the text.



# ROMEO AND JULIET

THE ITIM THEATRE ENSEMBLE

in association with

THE CAMERI THEATRE OF TEL AVIV

THE PIT, THE BARBICAN, LONDON

November, 1994

DIRECTOR Rina Yerushalmi

DESIGNERS Moshe Sternfeld  
Rakefet Levi

In *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare challenges the accepted upper class mores of his day which said that a father had the right to choose a spouse for his children, especially his daughter. Juliet is in the line of those courageous girls who claim the right to choose for themselves. In the play, Shakespeare upholds the principle of romantic love, which is more important to the protagonists than the political scene around them. Though, as G.K. Hunter points out

The rash and personal passion of Romeo and Juliet can hardly claim a truly

tragic significance if it cannot be caught up in the corporate and continuing life of Verona...the extreme acts of tragic individuals contribute to the past and future as well as to the brilliant present of personal assertion, here where they join the confluence of acts that make up social continuity. (in Taylor and Loughy, 1990, pp 124/5)

If the Montagues and Capulets had not been sworn enemies and Juliet's 'only love' had not been, as she says, 'sprung from my only hate', then Capulet might have been happy to negotiate with Montagues for her marriage to his son. The political situation prevents this and so the tragedy occurs. Shakespeare is, as in all his tragedies, showing how private actions affect and are affected by politics. The Prologue says that Verona is a city

Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean

and although the weapons are only swords, it is a situation with which we are only too familiar today.

In this play, Shakespeare shows also the terrifying consequences which being in love itself can bring. For Romeo and Juliet fall in love and marry without really knowing each other, having only desire as a basis for their marriage and without the sanction of family and society. For an Elizabethan girl of good family, marriage meant an alliance to the advantage of her family. Her father had the right to dispose of her as he wished. As Irene Dash points out a woman had no right to control her own body, and the actions of Shakespeare's women



...grow from particularized, specific experiences, presented against a background of a patriarchal society. In that world, women must think of themselves as "Other", and man as primary or "Subject", banish ideas of self-sovereignty; not rely on economic independence to assure freedom; and forgo challenging societal patterns...the female [is perceived] as subordinate. (Dash, 1987, p 249)

Lawrence Stone, writing about the conditions prevailing in the sixteenth century, promulgates the idea that Protestantism realized that marriage was a valuable state, as good as the celibacy preferred by the Catholic Church. Stone says that there was an increasing, though limited, recognition that the young people concerned should have a right of refusal.

At first, in the early sixteenth century, children were bought and sold like cattle for breeding, and no-one thought that the parties concerned had any right to complain. But Protestant moral theology, with its stress on 'holy matrimony' slowly forced a modification of this extreme position, which was only maintained in the highest ranks of the aristocracy where stakes of property and power were largest. To retain 'holy matrimony'... it was necessary to develop some affection for each other. It was therefore thought necessary to concede to the children a right of veto, the right to reject a spouse chosen by the parents on the ground that antipathy aroused by a

single interview was too great to permit the possibility of the future development of affection. (Stone, in Watts: p 91)

Juliet's father, at first, says that she can have this right of veto, but he goes back on this and insists that she marries the County Paris. Her relationship with her parents is not a loving one. Her conversation with her Mother is very formal (she calls her 'Madam' ) and she seems scarcely to know her Father. Her nurse is important, as she has been with Juliet all her life. As Lawrence Stone comments

Only the children of the very rich, like Shakespeare's Juliet, enjoyed a wet-nurse who lived in the home and stayed on with them later as a nurse throughout their childhood...Sometimes the relation to the wet-nurse was the closest affinity in the child's life...Shakespeare's Juliet was deeply attached to her nurse, but had only stiff and formal relations with her mother, who could not even remember her exact age. (Stone in Watts: p 93)

Juliet's attachment to her nurse, it is submitted, can be questioned. It seems that Juliet was very aware that the Nurse was a servant - she never really confides in her as romantic girls do to a close confidante, and she orders her around, making the Nurse run errands and accept the situation with Romeo without any discussion. It is significant, also, that the Nurse calls Juliet 'Madam'. Part of Juliet's tragedy is her isolation, she has no one to help or advise her when she falls headily in love. She is an ardent girl and although she pauses once to consider that her love for Romeo is



ROMEO AND JULIET

THE PIT, LONDON



from: the Programme

...too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden,  
Too like lighting...(Act 2 scene ii)

She quickly determines on marriage

If thy bent of love be honorable  
Thy purpose marriage, send me word tomorrow  
By one that I'll procure to come to thee  
Where and what time thou wilt perform the rite  
All my fortunes at thy foot I'll lay  
And follow thee my lord throughout the world.  
(Act 2 scene ii)

She is taking an immensely bold step, not only in marrying one of her family's enemies, but, by disobeying her father, she is putting herself out of his protection. In this respect, Shakespeare seems to be identifying with a woman's right to choose for herself (as he did again with Desdemona), and to fictionalize the ideas being debated in sermons of the time (for full discussion, see Watts p 89 onwards). If it were not for the serious political undertone to the play the events which keep Romeo and Juliet apart after his banishment might be more suitable for a black farce than a tragedy. Juliet, though, seems to be less resolute after her marriage than before. Why did she not leave Verona with Romeo? But, perhaps, only tragedy could have solved Verona's problems. And the mistakes that occur do make for a thrilling ending.

*Romeo and Juliet* has some of the most ardent poetry in all Shakespeare. It has a buoyancy and intoxication about it which expresses youthful love and, also, that exaggerated despair felt by most young people. Its many forms, rhyming couplets, sonnets, as well as some



of the most charming iambic pentameters shows Shakespeare's skill with many verse forms, which are always used to depict character. Mercutio's Queen Mab speech hurtles along, showing his impulsive nature, while Juliet's 'Gallop apace' shows young love at its most passionate. The stately sonnet when the lovers meet gives both gravity and formality to the occasion, as does the sonnet which opens and explains the play. Yet, the verse, though rigid in form throughout is still limpid and expressive, the characters weaving different patterns of pace and vocabulary for each character. Mercutio does not sound like Romeo, neither does Juliet sound like her Mother. Shakespeare gives each character his 'voice' and individuality, and this is perhaps the more remarkable as it was an early play. Q1 was published in 1597 and is a bad Quarto: Q 2 (1599) was the authorized version: "As it hath been sundry times publicquely acted by the right/Honourable the Lord Chamberlain/his Servants" (for full discussion see Gibbons: *Arden Edition*:1992: pi onwards).

It is the story and the verse which makes this play so enjoyable in the theatre, for above all this is a play of passion and extravagant desire, mixed with verbal wit and some earthy comedy. It swings from great joy to hopeless despair: from great love and expectancy to death. It is full of romantic, ardent young people who love and die: who speak romantic verse and also make funny, obscene jokes: it vibrates with the hot, swift actions of the people concerned. The touching vulnerability of Juliet, who tries to take charge of her life is one that the audience can identify with, for who has not defied parents at one time or another? The tragedy of the lovers' deaths, set against a turbulent political background makes for an exciting, dramatic, 'two hours traffic of our stage'.

So, we have a play about youthful rashness in which the leading characters have to look young but be able to deal with the verse. We have a story which is ostensibly set in the early modern period, but which has resonances for us today when many young people are separated by civil war in their own countries. The question of inter-marriage between race and class is still a debating point in many societies today. A director has to consider this when both casting and considering which period to put the play. Rina Yerushalmi said (in interview with writer) that a starting off point for her had been the Arab/Israeli conflict, but that it was only a starting point and that, as the rehearsals progressed, the story of the young lovers became paramount. She had not wanted the conflict to overwhelm the experiences of the lovers. Michael Bogdanov in the Royal Shakespeare's Main House production of the play felt strongly that the conflict should be emphasised, for there are still societies where Juliet's plight is still a dilemma. His Juliet, Niamh Cusack, says:

I began to imagine that her father, a wealthy businessman in that claustrophobic atmosphere [Mafia Italy] would have the telephone tapped and his daughter would live in constant danger of being kidnapped, so that if she made a move [to join Romeo] his guards would be straight after her. (Smallwood and Jackson, 1988, pp 123/4)

A Juliet living in Mafia Italy, but Cusack also comments that the situation is also appropriate to Northern Ireland or the Lebanon, or Israel.



The Itim Theatre Ensemble have, in Tel Aviv, a neutral white space which is twice the size of The Pit in the Barbican where the company appeared as part of the EVERYBODY'S SHAKESPEARE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL (October/November 1994). The company's realisation of *Romeo and Juliet* was played in Hebrew, which has a lovely flowing sound to it. Sur-titles relayed a direct translation of the original words, when they were used, and also of the intervening narrative, for this performance was not a straight translation of Shakespeare's text, but, rather, as an essay on the love story. If you take away Shakespeare's own language, especially in a play that has such rhythms and words in it, then much of the enjoyment is lost. Shakespeare's special genius is for being able to combine vibrant language, which is entirely appropriate to the character speaking, with the telling of an exciting story. Even a skilled translation loses much of the original impact. But Rina Yerushalmi created an extraordinary piece of theatre while editing and manipulating the original text. She relied on action and the dream-like quality that her actors produced.

The audience entered The Pit to be greeted by two figures in Venetian Carnival costume who smiled and nodded. Actors were drifting round the space wearing black cloaks and masks. From time to time they would ascend the steps up the tiers of seats, which were arranged on two sides of the acting area, and murmur something in Hebrew. They were 'in character' and did not answer any questions. Up stage right was a platform and some steps, while down stage left was a statue of a horse (see illustration) which acted as a bed for *Romeo and Juliet*, and which disintegrated into pieces during the performance to show the disintegration of society. A character who spoke the Prologue was dressed and made up like the Master of Ceremonies in *Cabaret*. He became one of the Juliets in the course of

the action. Yes, one of the Juliets, for in this production there were four Juliets and four Romeos. The problem of casting the lovers with actors who look young enough for the part was largely overcome by the form of the playing. It can be argued that, in Shakespeare's day the part of Juliet would have been played by a boy of fifteen or sixteen (for the age of Boy Players see Leslie Gibson, 1995, p 20 onwards). Actors can, of course, by sheer acting look younger than they are. Ian McKellen, who was about to play Romeo at the age of thirty-four told John Walker

...I have never seen a young actor bring off the part; in fact I have never seen any actor bring off the part. (Observer: 21st March, 1976)

But Yerushalmi's actors were all young and vibrant, and extremely good-looking. And they did not have to speak all the complex verse as the parts were distributed among them. What they did have to convey was deep emotion for a short space of time, easier than for a whole play. They just had to concentrate on the sections in which they were cast. So different actors played the Balcony scene, to those that played the marriage scene or the death scenes. Yerushalmi concentrated on the emotions behind the words.

'When you are in love' she said 'time and space mean nothing. When you first meet and declare your love you are already thinking about marrying, so when one couple are playing the Balcony scene, there is another already going to the Friar to ask about marriage, and another already marrying." So we saw all these events happening at once, with different lovers. This was an



attempt to reproduce the split screen technique used in some films in a theatre. Sometimes, to get this effect, Juliet would be played by one of the male actors, and sometimes the actors would be miming the actions while the Master of Ceremonies said the text. At the end there were four Juliets 'emoting' on stage, which made for some confusion. Speeches were not always spoken by the character for whom they were written, so that the Master of Ceremonies spoke 'Gallop apace' and Friar Lawrence said Juliet's poison speech.

The fights, which were played by the men stripped to the waist, and by girls in gypsy costume were particularly exciting. They were very tough and the actors branded themselves with sticks of greasepaint to indicate blood. One of the inspirations, as has been said, for this production was the Arab/Israeli conflict and, although this was not unduly stressed, some of the costumes, particularly in the fights, looked Middle-Eastern, but they also ranged from medieval to white tie and tails.

The most ill-conceived character was the Nurse, who played her part in a very cute manner, making eyes at the boys and generally mugging a lot: this was an embarrassment in a small space and was both ill-judged and unnecessary, for instead of, as the rest of the cast, experiencing her rôle she acted in a manner more suitable for a large theatre. The rest of the actors played in a concentrated but very physical way, the movements being both strong and graceful, almost balletic. The gestures were large and rounded. It was the movement that made this production exciting, not the words, not the characterizations. The emotions of the text got lost in a storm of physical actions and, although the production and conception was exciting, a lack of real psychological insight, so strong in Shakespeare, made this a piece more to watch than to be

drawn into. A sense of involvement in the story, a feeling that the best small space productions can give, did not occur.

Was this really a small space production or would it have been better to see it in a larger theatre? It was, of course, conceived for a small space (though one that is bigger than where it played in London), but if it had been on a larger scale would the action have been diffused? One of the troubles in watching this production was that there was simply too much to see at any one time. The actors were very committed, but their commitment was more to each other than to the audience. It was also, for English audiences, distracting to have to keep an eye on the sur-titles, for the play was not being followed chronologically.

Rina Yerushalmi called her production a 'symphonic structure' which turned 'the theatre into a space of poetic imagination'. Poetry, though, is concerned with words, and that is what was missing, the sheer, sensuous pleasure of his words. The language was missing. David Nathan in the *Jewish Chronicle*, 11th November, 1994 (one of the very few notices that appeared of this production) said that it had 'a lyricism rarely found in more conventional productions' But it was a lyricism that was more like ballet or mime than a considered production of a play. The space was well used, but too much was going on simultaneously so that one was distracted constantly. There was none of the political comment of the original play so a whole dimension was lost, as was much of the original play and there was no sense of involving the audience. It was a performance for onlookers - striking, original but very alienating.



THE OTHER PLACE

INTERIOR 1993



from: Mulryne and Shrewing (1993) p 27

## HENRY V1 - PART 3

THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE TOURING COMPANY

THE OTHER PLACE, STRATFORD-upon-AVON

Summer, 1994

and also

THE DOLPHIN LEISURE CENTRE

HAYWARDS HEATH

Winter, 1994

part of a tour to fourteen places in the U.K. using the Royal Shakespeare Company's touring structure. The production toured abroad also.

DIRECTOR                      Katie Mitchell

DESIGNER                      Rae Smith

HENRY V1                      Jonathan Firth

*Henry V1 Part Three* is the third part of Shakespeare's first tetralogy, and was first published in a Quarto version as *Richard, Duke of York*. It was not until the Folio that three plays were grouped together in histo-



rical, chronological order as *Henry VI, Parts 1, 2 & 3*. Part 3 nevertheless, does stand up as a separate play, dealing with the disputes between the Lancastrians, led by the adult Henry VI himself and his bold Queen, Margaret, and the House of York, led by Richard, Duke of York, and, at his death, by his son Edward. The play also concerns the fortunes of the Earl of Warwick, known to history as Warwick the Kingmaker. It tells the story of the Wars of the Roses from after the first battle of St Albans to the final defeat of Henry and his death - though, in the play, the manner of his death is not historically accurate, there being no evidence that he was killed by Richard Crookback. No one, though, would go to Shakespeare for an precise account of history, though Peter Saccio in *Shakespeare's English Kings*, 1977 gives a detailed account of this turbulent time and shows that Shakespeare, while omitting or transposing some people and some events, such as the battle of Barnet (though he includes the Three Suns episode), is mainly accurate in his chronology. (See also *Arden Edition*, 1989, the play p liii). Shakespeare seems to have used the *Chronicles of Hall* as well as those of *Holinshed* for his source material.

Phyllis Rackin in *Stages of History*, 1990, points out that representation of history on the stage is quite a different process to that of writing history itself, and that, at the time in which Shakespeare wrote, historiographic practice was changing from being poetic to being more interested in fact. The theatre was

...a focus for political, religious, and philosophical anxieties. Nevertheless, although both historical writing and theatrical performances were sites of instability - history in the process of change and the public commercial theatre

of creation - and although both revealed pressure of a rapidly changing culture, there were also profound cultural oppositions between the regulated domain of historical writing and the volatile scene of theatrical performance...[the theatre] was deeply involved in the same destabilizing social transformations that produced the nostalgic desire for a stable, historical past. (Rackin, 1990, p 22)

This nostalgia for the Middle Ages was shown in the pageantry of the English Court and in the Medieval Tournaments which were performed regularly in honour of Elizabeth. There was a wish in all classes for members of it to become gentlemen, and purchase coats of arms (Shakespeare being one of their ambitious number). We find, however, that the wish for a romantic past, a past which was represented as containing patriarchal order, religious romanticism and chivalry ran through all classes. In the theatre, though, which was a place where subversive comment could be made, provided it did not impinge on current personalities and events, the past was a place that was seen more cynically, and the traditional connection between historical record and romantic poetry was broken down. Plays regarded history with some respect but always sacrificed historical accuracy to thrilling and dramatic effects. As Rackin points out

Although the commercial theatre setting tended in general to subvert historical tradition, heterogeneity of the audience and the discursive instability of the new institution produced a polyvalent



discourse that resisted the imposition of one single meaning. (Rackin, 1990, p 27)

For the nostalgic memories re-inacted by Elizabeth's courtiers were false to human nature. Splendid entertainment, no doubt, but the theatre, Shakespeare's theatre, dealt with human nature, the foibles and cruelties of man and woman: the accidents that change history: the characteristics that cause those accidents. We should not, either, judge him for historical inaccuracy in the light of our knowledge today. In the theatre, history has always to be redefined, drama giving way to exactness. Characters, such as Richard Crookback were inaccurate historically, but effective dramatically. Events are allowed to be telescoped or omitted to tell an exciting story within the confines of space and time as measured in the theatre. Shakespeare showed us the Middle Ages for what they were, unchivalric, cruel and crude. Even at the beginning of his career, he knew what made good drama.

Shakespeare, then, was bound by the actual historical events, but used them theatrically. There is no obvious structure to this play - event follows event - but it could well be divided into three. The first part seems to end at York's death: the second after the French scene, the last section being taken up by the defeat and death of Henry. Another choice would be to divide either before the French scenes, so emphasising the change of place.

At this early stage, Shakespeare had not yet found his full mastery of character. The Duke of York, Warwick and, to a certain extent, Edward are interchangeable (Edward has only his lechery to distinguish him). They

are politicians and soldiers. Three of the characters, though, are more realized. Margaret shows a wide range of emotions - anger, pride, an ability to curb herself to get what she wants, an ambitious mother-love. Henry VI, a weak character, is one of those unhappy mortals who are unable or unwilling to act as they should, a line of character that Shakespeare would develop more fully through Richard II, Brutus and Hamlet. They are men who have a strong spiritual and philosophical side to their natures, Henry particularly believes piously in God, and, in the pastoral scenes, gives voice to reflective, ruminative thought. This is also apparent in the scene in which he cogitates about the battle of Towton showing a moral sense lacking in the other characters. He fails in those attributes of kingship that are necessary, especially in the turbulent kingdom he rules and the belligerent, pugnacious men with whom he has to deal. As Aristotle believed, men had to find the mean between two opposites, so a King should be merciful, but he also has to be stern. Justice was important, but it must be neither too cruel nor too clement. Henry has the virtue of wanting justice and having his valid claim to the throne acknowledged, but he has not the strength of character to impose this on his aggressive cousins. Above all, he is aware that he holds his kingdom as God's anointed and his spirituality is most important to him being the centre of his life. He tries to lead the life of a Christian King and tries to temper aggression with mercy. He expresses pity, peace and love but he fails. Even his plea when he is about to die cannot sway Crookback to his way of thinking.

In Richard Crookback we see a sketch of Shakespeare's first villain which would soon, and still does, electrify audiences with his crude but vibrant vitality. So well is this character realized in this play that many of the lines he speaks are often interpolated into



the text of *Richard III*. He is, of course, an enigma - why does he hate his brothers so much? Why is he so evil? He is the character who grows throughout the play. At first the most explosive of York's sons, he develops into an energetic malevolent being with great ambition - the greatest - to hold the crown of England.

This, the play's theme, who should wear the crown, reaches its most vigorous in Richard's desire. He is the outcast, the crippled son but, as J.P. Brockbank writes

Shakespeare has him use fantastic lore about his birth to admirable effect: it strengthens the impression of blasphemy against love and fertility, makes deformity license depravity and, most important, allegorizes the birth of a political monster in the present by recalling that of a physical monster in the past "like to a chaos or an unlick'd bear-whelp"...The sense of violent struggle, of unnatural energies breaking free, is best caught [in the speech which begins in Act 3 scene ii]

And I -like one lost in a thorny wood

(Brockbank, 1962 pp63/4)

Another character about whom similar questions can be asked is Young Clifford, a part which has some interesting characteristics, although he is not fully realized.

The whole play is permeated with a unifying irony. The

characters, as often in real life, do not fully know or understand the events that they are, at the same time, helping to shape. They often appear confident when the audience knows that their confidence is false for their world is collapsing about them. What keeps them going is hope and the feeling that this is their destiny. Henry stands by his assertion and belief that he is the rightful king by birth and by anointing. He has been so since he was nine months old. The Yorkists stand by their conviction that their right to the throne is stronger than that of the Lancastrian king. It is a situation that cannot, will never be solved. Shakespeare sees, always, the hopes and fallibilities of human nature, though he is yet not so skilled a playwright as he was to become in depicting them. They lack subtlety and fine shading. The play is also an *apologia* for the dynasty that conquered Richard and by marrying gained the throne on very little claim. Look, the tetralogy seems to say, what life was like then before we were so wisely governed. The Elizabethan may have had a nostalgia for the trappings of the Middle Ages, as Rackin, 1990, suggests, but Shakespeare show<sup>i</sup> the people of that period in all their lusts and brutalities. Peace, internal peace, was something that Elizabeth worked hard to achieve. Shakespeare showed the greatness of this achievement by his portrayal of these horrific events and callous people. The plays might be the work of a young and inexperienced playwright, but they show many of the characteristics that he was to display with such consummate mastery later on - how to tell a complex story: how to use irony and humour to point up tragic events: how to create characters that reverberate in our minds and our imaginations and how political events shape lives and lives political events. He shows a country torn by civil war - he could have been writing about today.

This was something much in the mind of Katie Mitchell



when she directed this play. In her gentle, spiritual production she made her purpose quite clear - to tell the story of the Battle for the Throne, a phrase she used as a sub-title, and to show, also, civil war in all its horrors. Her company of thirteen men and two women was small and compact for this was the Royal Shakespeare's Touring Production for the years 1994/5. The smallness of the company for such an epic work meant that several characters had to be dropped altogether (the Lady Bona in the French scenes, for example) while others were conflated, Somerset's and Oxford's lines being given to other characters or cut altogether. Mitchell also incorporated lines from *Gorboduc*, *2 Henry VI*, and *Richard III*. Lines from these plays were given to Rutland or Clarence and helped, by expanding their parts, to make the Yorkists a more formidable family. Exeter's parts also contained lines from missing characters and the Earl of Richmond, the future Henry VII, was omitted (see Prompt Book).

The Other Place in 1994 (it has since been altered) was an almost square room with balconies all the way round. The seats on the ground level could be altered to suit the production. It held around 250 people, depending on how the seats were arranged. For this production, Mitchell chose to have seats on three sides of a raised platform stage, and to use three sides of the balconies leaving the fourth side at the back as an acting area. The platform was covered in charred pieces of wood and leaves: at the back were two rust-coloured doors which had further small doors in them, and one at middle level which opened, representing a window or city wall battlement. Above this door was a painting of St George, rather in the style of an icon, and there was also a small door at the side which opened to reveal a shrine at which people prayed. Next to it was a tall, thin conifer, and at the opposite corner, downstage left

was a rope attached to a bell. Banners were used at the back to signify the court of England or of France. The furniture consisted of a simple wooden throne, wooden chairs and a small table. The Other Place is particularly rich in exits, one on each side at the back of the stage, one on the balcony at each side, besides the exits created by Mitchell and her designer, Rae Smith, in the on-stage doors. Also, the double doors through which the audience comes and goes out can be used by the cast. So the players can make entrances and exits through the audience, thus including them in the action. For example, the play opened with the main doors of the theatre crashing open and the York family stamping through the audience onto the stage to confront Henry, a movement that was only possible in this space: it was violent, sudden and immediate. In a large theatre, although the Yorkists could have come through the main aisle of the theatre (say at the Olivier) the effect would not have been so immediate as the aisle is much longer and this would have dissipated the violence. In The Other place, too, a through movement was created by members of the cast entering by the doors at the back, marching over the platform and exiting either through the main doors (held open by the stage management) or one of the other exits right or left. The reverse movement was also possible and used. When on tour in the British Isles, the Royal Shakespeare Company takes its own structure with it, which takes a day and a half to set up. This enlarges the acting area as there is a surrounding space to three sides of the platform which gives the players another level to work on. There is no central exit in this structure so the first entrance of the Yorkists had to be from right and left, as did other of the entrances or exits. This structure holds five hundred seats which are arranged in tiers round three sides. This tiered structure, without the central exit was also put into The Other Place in 1997. As Irving Wardle said in the *Independent on Sunday*, 14th August, 1994



3 HENRY VI

THE OTHER PLACE



courtesy of The Shakespeare Centre

[The] staging...reduces the contest to its basic components and the kingdom to a play thing: an up stage door, a window for siege debates, a downstage throne. It is as diagrammatic as a board-game, with every fresh atrocity coming as casually as the throw of a dice. Shakespeare lays down the ground-rules.

The cast was dressed in simplified medieval clothes, without trimming or elaboration, but keeping medieval silhouettes. The men wore ankle-length tunics in a rough, whitish colour, clean for court scenes, muddied for battles. Brown boots and dull copper-coloured armour were added when needed. The women wore white dresses. Everyone wore a red or white rose on their sleeves to indicate to which party they belonged. This, again, was an effect which was only possible in a small space: for larger theatres, Mitchell said she would have replaced these with banners (Interview with researcher).

Several events influenced Katie Mitchell's concept of the play. She had always wanted it to be a cool production. 'We see blood and dead bodies on our TV screens every day' she told the writer 'hot - bloody - so I deliberately wanted this to be cool. Then two of the cast suffered bereavements - one because of a shooting accident. We had to be sensitive to that - from that moment all weapons were out of the rehearsal room'. There was bad luck with the players, too. The actor playing Edward IV was taken ill: his understudy had to take over until an older actor was found and the whole play re-rehearsed. The actor playing Essex hurt his back so could not lift up a corpse. He asked



whether it would be all right if he just led the dead body out. All these incidents led to some imaginative and moving solutions to the play's problems.

One of the major difficulties in this play concerns the age of the protagonists. At the beginning of the play, historically, King Henry, York and Margaret are in their early thirties or late twenties. Yet York is attended by 'his mess of sons' who appear as grown men. Henry's son, Edward, was also, historically, a child. A director has to decide whether to play the main characters at the age they were historically (that is in their thirties) and ignore, as Shakespeare does, the discrepancy between their ages and their children's, or does he cast middle-aged people as Henry, York and Margaret? When acting the whole tetralogy, with the same actors in the same parts all the way through, they can age as seems credible by the use of make-up in a large theatre, whereas, in a small space only a little make-up can be used. Penny Downie, who played Margaret in Adrian Noble's adaptation of the plays, called *The Plantagenets* at both the main theatre in Stratford and in the Barbican, London, 1988/9, played Margaret at fifteen when she first appeared (Margaret's real age): began the second part, made from *2 Henry VI* and some of *3 Henry VI* at thirty-fivish, which meant by the time the last section was played she played Margaret as in her forties, over ten years older than the real Margaret (Jackson and Smallwood, 1993, p 114 onwards). In the Hall/Barton adaptation (1963) Warwick and York were played middle-aged throughout by substantial actors (Donald Sinden and Brewster Mason). The mature Peggy Ashcroft managed to look fifteen as Margaret at her first entry, while in *Richard III* she appeared as an old hag. Photographs of the production show how much she relied on make-up, which is possible in a large theatre, with its greater range of lights, but in a small space becomes too obvious. Make-up in somewhere like The

Other Place has to be natural and light. Mitchell decided to follow Shakespeare's insouciance when it came to ages. She cast Henry (Jonathan Firth), Margaret (Ruth Mitchell) and Warwick (Jack Keegan) as the actual ages they were historically when the play commences and did not worry that they looked too young to have grown-up children, nor did she age them during the nearly eighteen years which the play covered. Mitchell was, thus, true to Shakespeare.

There were no actual battle scenes in this production. When these were indicated in the text, Mitchell and her Fight Director, Malcolm Ransom staged them without any actual fighting. Sometimes the actors would enter in two lines, armed with staves which they banged rhythmically on the floor and march over the stage and out through the main exit: another time they rushed through the theatre from back to front with their staves in their hands: on other occasions they came on in file, beating drums, and again marched through the audience. It created the feeling that the audience was participating. Paul Taylor, writing in *The Independent* 12th August, 1994, thought that

The fighting is not staged but thrillingly implied as troops march on to intimidating drumbeats under swirling snow and then hustle out to battle.

Again, these were effects that were pertaining to conditions in a small space theatre, where fighting with swords, for example, can be really dangerous for the audience. The sound track, too, helped the battles to be realistic, as the howling of wild animals ~~were~~ discernable. At the end of a battle, a member of the



cast, generally Exeter, would come on and place a small wooden cross on the edge of the platform - again a small theatre possibility. The small crosses would not be visible in a larger space though Matthew Warchus in his production of *Henry V* (1994/5) had a similar effect: while the Battle of Agincourt was taking place the children of the company came on the stage bearing sheaves of poppies in their arms, which they placed round the stage, but these were large, and colourful, and stood out in the Main House, whereas Mitchell's crosses were small.

The removal of the dead bodies, as has been said, was particularly inventive and moving. A female figure, dressed in a simple black shift with a black veil, came through the back doors to the dead body, which then rose and they held hands while the woman sang words from a Requiem Mass, then they would walk out. Sometimes members of the company would join them, also singing. From time to time they would be carrying censers and banners. Always the stage would darken. Again there was the effect of including the audience in the procession, especially as the incense wafted around the theatre. In a larger space, of course, only those in the front rows would have been affected by the smell. In the scene with the Son who has killed his Father and the Father who has killed his Son, the protagonists came on with small bundles in their hands, and, during their speeches, opened them to reveal, in one case, a white rose, in the other, a red. Again, this moving action would have been lost in a larger space.

The French scenes were conducted in French, until the Messenger came. 'I wanted to make a great change here' Katie Mitchell explained. 'We did have banners with *fleur-de-lis* on them at the back, but we couldn't make any scenic changes so I decided to have everyone speaking French'. In a larger theatre and a larger

cast, the changes could have been more dramatic, with attendants bearing banners onto the stage with *fleur-de-lis* on them and different uniforms to those worn by attendants in the English court, an option unavailable to this director. Margaret had spoken with a slight French accent, a guttural 'R' and she pronounced names as if they were French - 'Enri, for example, and Edouard. The other odd accent was that of Richard Crookback. Played by Tom Smith who affected a Yorkshire accent. Smith said (to the writer) that it had been decided that, because of his deformity, he had probably not been educated with his brothers but sent to a farm to be brought up by peasant farmers. That would also account for his hatred of his brothers and his ambitious desire to surpass and surplant them. The other 'bad' character in the play, Young Clifford (Jamie Hind) played the scene with Rutland almost like a love scene, holding Rutland in his arms before he drove the dagger in. 'They were all so young' said Mitchell 'Clifford was so angry at his father's death and too young to deal with it other than by revenge'. This scene was played very quietly and with a stillness that would only be possible in a small space. On a larger stage it would have had to have been played with more bravura to energize the space between the two actors and the audience. Mitchell thought of this play as being 'about young men being catapulted into a political situation before they are ready for it. All pity has gone, and because of grief they become monsters'. Irving Wardle thought that the production was 'engrossing' and that

For all their *realpolitik* insights "The Wars of the Roses", and Adrian Noble's later "Plantagenets" cycle, still offered a spectacle of martial grandeur with tragic aspirations...It was left to..Mitchell, in this touring production,



to see through the boys' power games. (*Independent* on Sunday, 14th August, 1994)

This production used the confines of a small space with intelligence and imagination, demanding real commitment from the audience. Katie Mitchell had made this play about real people with their lusts and their griefs, and by intimate, committed and intense direction and acting: by using all the entrances and spaces available so that her cast could walk through the audience she made the audience feel that they were in the actual events themselves, squatting in fields, standing around in palaces, taking part in burial processions. The singing was very potent in creating atmosphere, as was the sound track (Musical Director: Helen Chadwick). 'Every sound in it, even the swans, was in the 'text' Mitchell said. This made for an immediacy, and intergrated events, made them seem as if they were taking place in natural surroundings. As Paul Taylor wrote

At one point, in the tense pause before they [the combatants] make their deadly charge, the lovely drift of innocent birdsong drops into the moment like an ache of nostalgia and a moral judgement on the scene. (*Independent*: 12th August, 1994)

To quote Irving Wardle again

Stylistically, the most striking aspect of the show is its conversational tone. Why choose a play designed for surging

rhetorical delivery only to suppress the  
 rhetoric? There is no denying the loss  
 of rhythmic vitality...But this is  
 outweighed by the gain in dramatic  
 impact. (*Independent on Sunday*: 14th  
 August, 1994)

Mitchell and her cast produced an eloquent and moving  
 production that was the more so because it was played in  
 a confined space. As Michael Billington said

Mitchell...not only recreates the past  
 but also brings out the pain and  
 violation of divine law inseparable from  
 civil tumult. (*Guardian*: 12th August,  
 1994)

Alastair Macaulay summed it up in the *Financial Times*,  
 12th August, 1994, when he wrote

Mitchell, it seems, wants to show this  
 play's formality of pulse and structure;  
 wants to hold the characters' intensity of  
 feeling within the orderly forms accorded  
 them...the winner is Shakespeare.

Shakespeare was the winner because Katie Mitchell and  
 her cast let Shakespeare speak for himself, and drew the  
 audience into the thrilling events by speaking his words  
 directly to it and letting the feelings contained in  
 them be directed at it. As Mitchell, herself said



40 per cent of the play takes the form of direct audience address, as the characters manipulate opinion in a dramatic debate about civil war. (*The Independent*:10th August,1994)

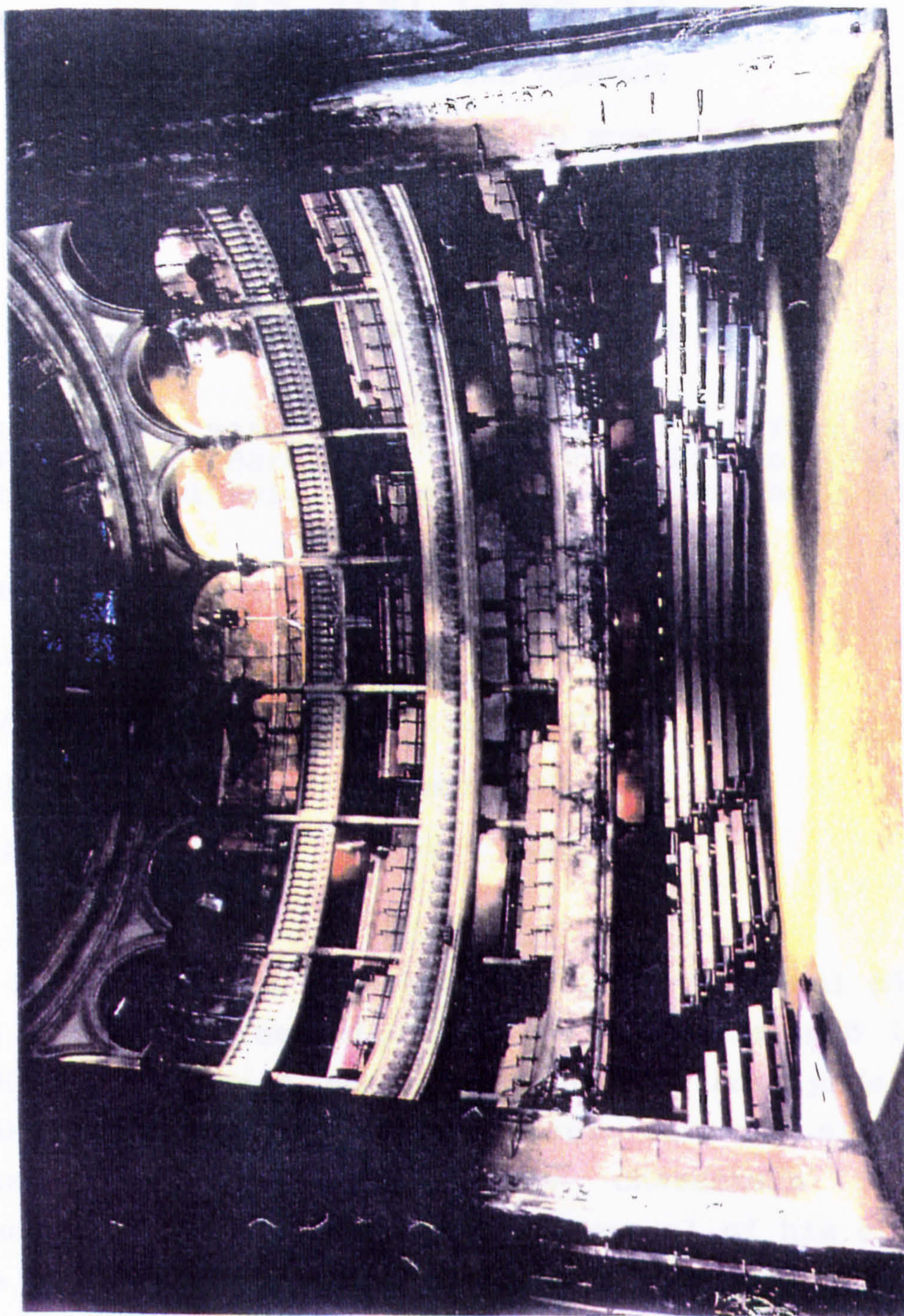
This effect meant that the actors involved the audience by being and speaking on the same scale as in ordinary life and by speaking to it directly, using moderate voices, human gestures that were neither declamatory nor rhetorical, but still letting the verse blaze (to use Irving Wardle's word). John Peter said that the small space had been manipulated

...to suggest vast territories and epic events, but also the intrusions of personal grief. (*Sunday Times*:14th August, 1994)

The audience was so close to the events, both physically and in imagination, that it could not but be aware of what terror civil war brings. 'And civil wars still take place, could happen, and do happen, today' Mitchell explained 'There are real life choices that have to be made in this situation and they are in this play'. This she made the audience believe because it felt so close to what was happening around them.



THÉÂTRE DES BOUFFES DU NORD, PARIS



courtesy of the theatre



# AS YOU LIKE IT

CHEEK BY JOWL COMPANY

THÉÂTRE DES BOUFFES DU NORD, PARIS

January, 1995

and at

THE ALBERY THEATRE, LONDON, WC2

part of a two year tour which included New York, Moscow, St Petersburg, Barcelona, Düsseldorf, Pilsen, Craiova, Bucharest, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem as well as the U.K.

DIRECTOR	Declan Donnellan
DESIGNER	Nick Omerod
ROSALIND	Adrian Lester
CELIA	Simon Coates
ORLANDO	Scott Handy

*As You Like It* is Shakespeare's great pastoral play and his litany to romantic love. Written around 1598 to 1600 it is based on Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde* though Shakespeare as his wont, makes several simplifying alterations and adds lively characters including Touchstone and Jacques. As in several of his comedies, the heroine makes a journey to a different place where she finds her true self and her true love. Rosalind's journey is set within the conventions of the pastoral genre as Juliet Dusinberre writes

The pastoral world , with its promise of a simple life and uncorrupt values, appealed strongly to the Elizabethans, despite their commitment to a highly

sophisticated court culture. (Royal Shakespeare Company Programme, 1992)

Pastoral romances, of course, were around since Roman times, and they were primarily about the simplicity of country life contrasted with court or town life. The courtiers, in disguise as shepherds and shepherdesses whiled away the time in amorous and delightful dalliance. The plot permitted disguise to endow a greater openness and sincerity than the original *persona* allowed. Courtiers still kept their dignity and position in society, though disguised, and the shepherds with which they consorted also spoke in a courtly manner. Neither the courtier shepherds nor the indigenous shepherds tended the sheep, but rather spent their time in writing poetry, making music and dancing. Underlings, or real shepherds did the actual work of looking after the sheep and goats and in Shakespeare they were either the clowns or had a kind of folk wisdom. They are as artificial in their way as the other two groups. It is noticeable in *As You Like It* that the indigenous shepherds (Phoebe and Silvius) speak verse, and it is Corin and William, the real shepherds who speak prose. Rosalind and Celia speak prose in the forest, but then they are imitating what they think shepherds are like, and have, as it were, missed a class.

The ideal of the Elizabethan pastoral convention is an innocent way of life, lived with simplicity, good fellowship and honesty. Status, though, is always kept: the hero and heroine always remain courtier shepherds, never real shepherds. They are always moneyed, sophisticated and educated. Shakespeare keeps this convention in *As You Like It* for in it he creates all the types of shepherd - Rosalind/Ganymede and Celia/Aliena are courtier shepherds: Phoebe and Silvius



indigenous shepherds, while, as has been said, the real or working shepherds are Corin and William. Corin, especially embodies the simple wisdom of a real countryman. It is interesting to note that Touchstone, who puts forth the view of the court in his scene with Corin, was once a countryman.

The other group of people who are courtier shepherds are, of course, the exiled Duke and his companions who get their food by hunting. The Duke represents authority in this world, which is both hierarchial and patriarchal ( a theme that informs the structure of the play), but his easy authority, won by respect, is in contrast to the more brutal authority of his brother the usurping Duke. But this golden world of Arcadia in the forest is an illusion (illusion being another theme of the play), for in the forest is hunger, cold weather and adversity. But the forest is not necessarily a real forest - it could be a forest of the imagination which contains snakes (that erotic symbol used by Shakespeare in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ), a lion as well as sheep, streams and deer. As Stanley Wells says

*As You Like It* is a pastoral play: like other exponents of the form, Shakespeare uses it as a basis for entertainment in which discussion of ideas plays an important though unobtrusive part.  
(Wells,1994,p 171)

One of the ideas discussed is politics, for the political fabric of the country in which the play is set has been destroyed by the usurpation of Duke Senior by his younger brother. This new state obviously has no appeal to the young men who flock to Arden to be with Duke Senior. But the political situation is only a

framework for this light comedy. Orlando comes to the forest because of the political structure as do the two girls: in the first scene he defines himself as his father's son and it is his rôle in the play to come out of the shadow of his father and, through his love of Rosalind, become his own person.

It is disguise, though, that is the important element of a pastoral plot, and which drives it along. Often mistaken identity, caused through the disguise, provides much of the comedy. Also, the hero and heroine, because of disguise, have greater freedom of speech than they could have if they had met conventionally. The disguise theme in *As You Like It* concerns a princess, Rosalind, who is exiled by her uncle, the usurping ruler, who goes to the forest where her father is living. For safety, because she fears thieves and the possibility of rape, she puts on man's clothing and becomes the 'brother' of her cousin, Celia, who leaves the court to be with Rosalind. With them goes the court fool, Touchstone. In the forest, Rosalind meets the man, Orlando, with whom she has fallen in love, and, pretending to be 'his' Rosalind, woos him into marriage by her wit and resourcefulness.

Does Orlando penetrate her disguise? This is one of the problems of the play, and one that the actors and director have to solve. The dialogue between the two suggests that he does not see through the disguise, but it is improbable that he does not. Admittedly, he has only seen Rosalind once in a highly emotional situation, and he might only have a blurred impression of her, and this becomes even more blurred when seeing her in boy's clothes. Late in the play he agrees with Duke Senior that Ganymede and Rosalind are similar, but assures the Duke that Ganymede is forest born. But actors also consider the sub-text. In this situation,



Orlando could be playing a double game. Perhaps he just does not want to acknowledge that Rosalind is Rosalind, for if he acknowledges that, then he cannot be a suitor for her. He is penniless and she is a princess, so it is better for him not to admit he knows. In that situation he can live his romantic dream of love, enjoy the company of his beloved, woo her in a free and pleasant manner. For Orlando to act as if he knows who Ganymede is but would rather not acknowledge that makes him a far more interesting character. For he, too, then is playing games, and this makes him stronger and less stupid. The situation leads to some of the wittiest and most delightful scenes. Much of it is satire, for Rosalind acts both herself and comments on women in love. Celia acts as a countercheck to Rosalind's emotions and, towards the end of the play actually upbraids Rosalind for betraying her sex. But Rosalind is 'fathoms deep in love' and is extravagant in that love for she feels a wild, sweet passion. She can see the funny side of it though, for sometimes she mocks herself, but generally her passion shines through, and, quite often, overmasters her when, for instance, she is genuinely grieved when Orlando has to leave her to attend on the Duke, and again when she faints at the sight of the bloody handkerchief. The feelings, though satirized on occasion, are nonetheless still genuine. She has, however, a wider range of feeling and expression than many of the other comedy heroines (it is the longest woman's part in the comedies) for she is capable of holding several viewpoints and her observation of other characters is acute. She divines the absurdity of Phoebe, the genuineness of Touchstone, the romanticism of Silvius and, at the end, shows her wisdom and authority.

Although the play is largely about the wooing of Orlando and Rosalind it is also about the relationship between the two girls, and how, as they grow up and find

marriage, that relationship changes. Celia and Rosalind have been together all their lives, first at Duke Senior's court, then, after the revolution, which brought Duke Frederick into power, Rosalind is not banished with her father. She remains at court because of Celia's intercession. Celia's love is very strong, and, in the opening scenes, it is she who is the active one, the initiator. When Rosalind is banished, it is Celia who decides to go with her, and it is she who suggests the disguise and the destination - the Forest of Arden. Her love is deep, imaginative and true. As she says

...Rosalind lacks then the love  
Which teaches thee that thou and I am one.  
Shall we be sunder'd? Shall we part sweet girl?  
No, let my father seek another heir.  
Therefore devise with me how we may fly  
Whither to go and what to bear with us,  
And do not seek to take your charge upon you,  
To bear your griefs yourself and leave me out.  
For by this heaven, now at our sorrows pale,  
Say what thou canst, I'll go along with thee.  
(Act 1 scene ii)

Rosalind, at first, lags behind her in spirit and determination and it is not until she is forced into the man's rôle that she finds her true spirit, and her disguise seems essential to her being. In it she is more of herself than before. The magic of the forest is that it bestows on people the blessing of insight and self-knowledge: no one who enters it, or is born in it, is not so blessed. Like Corin, they come to a simple wisdom and a simple goodness. The conversion of Oliver which seems so arbitrary is not, in this context, for he, too, has been changed by Arden and become wiser. Likewise with Jacques, he seems cynical and selfish, but



Arden teaches him the simple truth that only goodness and integrity, being yourself, will do. Both Jacques and Touchstone, complementary characters, have famous speeches ('All the world's a stage' in Act 2 scene vii) and the Retort speech (Act 5 scene ii) which are actually like arias in an opera, but are also examples of Shakespeare's consummate and skilful stagecraft. The first one fills in the gap to allow Orlando to bring in Adam, while the other holds up the plot to excite the audience, keep them tense, for the final denouement. They are also examples of speeches which portray the character of their protagonists and are very funny. Touchstone is the link between court and country, and provides a framework to the action, while Jacques comments on it. While Touchstone can stand for comedy, Jacques adds melancholy to the play, which shows a darker side to romanticism. It is a correction to the more lush type of romanticism that Rosalind stands for, and Phoebe parodies, and it adds a sourness to a mixture that could be too sugary. Not that Rosalind lacks wryness for she proclaims

No, no Orlando; men are April when they  
woo, December when they wed; maids are  
May when they are maids, but the sky  
changes when they are wives. (Act 4  
scene i)

It has been mentioned before that the Forest of Arden is a magical place, and the final scene actively emphasises the magic. Rosalind/Ganymede stages a marriage masque and reveals herself. The play concludes with four marriages, a dance and an Epilogue - all problematic for the director. The Duke is restored to his rightful place, probably as a better ruler, and Rosalind becomes subservient again to her father and to Orlando. At least that is what the feminist critics would have us

AS YOU LIKE IT  
THÉÂTRE DES BOUFFES DU NORD



from *The Independent*, 24th November, 1994.



believe. As Gary Waller points out in his introduction to Peter B Erickson's essay 'Sexual Politics and the Social Structure in *As You Like It*'

Older critics spoke of its concern with 'love'; more recent ones have focused on gender. Peter Erickson argues in this much-praised essay that the seeming triumph of love at the play's end embodies a conservative compromise with traditional patriarchal gender assignments, embodies in Rosalind's act of 'giving' herself to her father and Orlando, thus re-establishing the conventional order. He reads the forest as an idealized conclave of ultimate male dominance in which both men and women may expand their sense of agency, but where female vitality is not allowed to become too independent. As Jean Howard likewise points out, Rosalind's cross-dressing enables her to redefine the role of women in patriarchy, but only to a limited extent; her actions show the constructed nature of gender assignment, but the hierarchical two-gender system is never queried. (Waller, 1991, pp 155/6)

Orlando though initially has fallen in love with Rosalind, loves Ganymede. Though she 'gives' herself to him it is freely done, and she can never cease to be Ganymede, for Ganymede is her true self, witty, wise, and, above all, free. She will still be her father's daughter, but she will be Orlando's wife as Ganymede. Self-knowledge cannot be unlearned. The Forest of Arden is a hierarchical society, and she has fitted into that - she respects her father even before she 'gives'

herself to him. Further, does 'give' necessarily mean 'giving up', and does a free gift imply restriction? Cannot the receiver be generous? These are questions left open at the end of the play, for Shakespeare, as always, makes his men and women, not merely players, but living people. In *As You Like It* he shows that the games that people play, particularly in love, reveal themselves to themselves and that lessons once learnt, cannot be unlearnt. The magic that the Forest weaves is that all who enter it change and become their true selves in a way that they could never be if they had remained outside. The hierarchy is kept, but not in the old rigid way. The protagonists have learnt to make the right choices, in the right way.

The play is very musical, there being no less than four songs in it as well as music needed for the Masque, so some good singers and at least one instrumentalist are needed. One of the songs, the hunting song, sets a problem. Do the foresters bring on an actual deer, or do they treat the song as a piece of merry-making? Some directors think this is an important scene of male bonding and the deer is necessary (John Dexter, National Theatre Production, 1979). Other directors treat it more casually. The Masque is a different matter, for the director has to consider whether the Masque is a rustic event or a piece of real magic with a *deus ex machina*, or as Steven Pimlott did in 1996 bring on a modern character, from the audience, to relate the play to today. This did not really work and Pimlott changed the conception during the run.

*As You Like It* is a play of words for nothing much happens in it. Young people fall in and out of love, they play games of disguise. It is a happy, lively play with a sense of fun, for it is a comedy of situation which entertains and, if well done, gives



great pleasure.

The Théâtre de Bouffes du Nord is a decaying theatre - at least structurally. Originally a proscenium arch theatre (the arch remains) it can now (just) be counted as a small space theatre with a wooden apron stage built out beyond the arch. The audience sits on padded benches circling the stage, and, as on this occasion, when the house is sold out, large cushions are placed on the floor in front of the first row. There are doors both down and up stage right and left for entrances. The Cheek by Jowl production of *As You Like It* had a very simple set with a creamy/beige cloth stretched across the back and sides on steel struts. There were struts across the top of the set also from which green ribbons unfurled in the second part to indicate the forest. Also a pattern of leaves was projected onto the backcloth, letting the audience use their imaginations to create the forest. In Main House Productions directors tend to have 'real' trees, though Pimlot had steel columns and a mound of earth to convey Arden.

For his production of the play Declan Donnellan chose to have an all male cast who entered together on an empty stage, dressed in black trousers and white shirts. Jacques started 'All the world's a stage' and at '...and the men' the actors crossed the stage towards the left, and at '...all the women', Adrian Lester and Simon Coates, who were playing Rosalind and Celia crossed over to the right. When the play proper started, the actors came forth to play their parts with the others watching. The stage cleared as each scene progressed and the actors exited in character. The costumes were modern, the Duke's Court were all immaculate in white tie and tails, the Duke himself with sleeked back hair, a brandy glass in one hand, a cigarette in the other. Adam was in an old tail coat, showing his status as a house-servant, while Orlando was in shabby trousers and shirt.

The two girls wore long satin dresses, Celia had pearls, Rosalind with a bandeau around her head, with glasses for reading. She also carried around with her a battered case in which she carried her books and treasured possessions. In the forest, as Ganymede, she wore breeches, loose shirt and jacket, but kept the bandeau. Celia was in nondescript dress and cardigan. The rest of the foresters and exiles were in rough brownish breeches and homespun shirts. The whole design concept was modern, without being aggressively so, very simple, and defined the characters without being obtrusive. Louise Doughty wrote in the *Mail on Sunday*, 29th January, 1995, that the set

consists of a minimalist beige background and the costumes are stark. What remains is the rich poetry of the language and the sheer exuberance of love and courtship.

while Alastair Macaulay in the *Financial Times*, 27th January, 1995 said that

These streamers are wonderful - we need no more forest than this - and yet it is a tribute to what we have already seen achieved with no scenic effect.

Not all the critics were entirely happy with this set. Kate Kellaway in the *Observer*, 29th January, 1995, seeing the play at the Albery thought that

Nick Omerod's set is chic but



underpowered. The white backdrops are a cop-out and the acid green streamers - though the colour is fantastic - give us a minimalist Arden. Magic is entirely missing...

This was, of course, a touring production that went to both small and large theatres: proscenium arch theatres and open space theatres. The designer chose to design a set that was minimalist, but which would set up in any configuration it met. But it worked in that it enabled scenes to flow one into another with rapidity but without losing clarity. The audience always knew where the players were supposed to be, and it also enabled characters to come on stage as the scene before was concluding. This happened in both theatres, but because the actors at the Bouffes du Nord came down to the apron, rather than centre stage (the apron being the focal point in this type of theatre and centre stage the focal point in a proscenium arch theatre) the audience could be in two places at once as scene followed scene, as it could have on the Elizabethan thrust stage. As Jane Edwardes remarked in *Time Out*, 18th January, 1995

By allowing one scene to invade the next, now a hallmark of Donnellan's productions, not only does he focus attention on Shakespeare's fascinating juxtapositions, but he also keeps the energy flowing right until the final curtain call. Nick Omerod's success in creating a forest out of hanging green streamers is entirely in keeping with an evening in which the audience *willingly participates* in a delightful evening. [my italics]

In the confines of the Bouffes du Nord where actors and audience shared the same level (the rows were in shallow tiers) the flow of one scene into another was exciting.

In the picture frame conditions of the Albery some of this flow was curtailed and seemed too cramped when the actors came on before the concluding scene was finished. Also, when, as happened occasionally, an actor left the scene through the audience, at the Bouffes du Nord he seemed to be walking out from a glade up a hill (the steps of the tiers) and still be part of the action. At the Albery, the actor stepped out of the picture (down some steps) and became a member of the audience, hanging around rather awkwardly, and so the audience were spectators rather than being enclosed and assisting in the performance. As Michael Billington in *The Guardian* 21st January 1995 recorded the play received standing ovations in Paris.

Having men playing the four women's parts (Lester and Cotes were joined by Wayne Carter as a very funny, bossy, self-assured Phoebe, while Richard Cant played a seductive and sweet Audrey) was entirely convincing. The audience was not, of course, seeing a production that was like one seen by Elizabethans for these were men, not adolescent boys. Nor did the men caricature women as a drag artiste does. They played human beings who happened to be women. Adrian Lester said in *The Independent*, 4th January, 1995

Initially, I was trying to be a woman and the more I tried, the more the audience noticed the gap. It was the moment that I got into trousers and forgot trying to be female that the audience started to believe I was.



Declan Donnellan, the director, told the men not to imitate women but to look for an inner femininity. Simon Coates (in the same feature) said that he started repressing traits that he thought too testosterone based and

The second I became too aggressive on stage, I thought 'Oh my God, I'm being too masculine'. But Declan said 'You've really got to go for the aggression'...I see Adrian as a woman all the time on stage.

Declan Donnellan explained

Exposing the nuts and bolts of theatre actually makes you more involved in the play. Instead of being a clever essay on gender confusion the device (of using men) opened up the play's emotional heart. (same feature)

Adrian Lester also says (in letter in Appendix 7)

Declan is of the school of Directors that allows the audience to believe in the play.

The question as to whether the cross-dressing was more effective in a small space than in the larger space of the Albery is not one that can be answered other than subjectively. Certainly, when the researcher saw the production in Paris the audience's reaction was greater

than than in London - more calls at the end, the whole audience, as Billington also recorded, standing, hands held high in applause. The men were entirely convincing as women and when the four men who played the girls came on together the applause reached a crescendo, In London, this did not happen (and the researcher has also questioned friends who saw the production at different performances), though the applause was warm. At the Bouffes du Nord there was more rapport with the audience as was noted by other critics, though not many critics saw the production in both places.

The problems inherent in the play were deftly handled, and again, because of the nearness of the audience to the players in the Bouffes du Nord seemed all the more effective. The relationship between Rosalind and Celia was defined as one of being of great love on the part of Celia. She caressed Rosalind as they lay on a rug (which was brought on to denote the girls' own room, a bit of business that was more effective in Paris than in London as the rug was more easily seen as it was placed almost on the apron stage) with an intensity that was more than cousinly. Rosalind's attitude towards the usurping Duke was one of a frightened, abject girl, and during his tirade against her, Celia's looks of concern were again intense. There was no doubt that she loved and was in love with Rosalind. This emotion was carried on throughout the play, Simon Coates showing his jealousy of Orlando by looks, and the refusal to perform the mock marriage was very moving because of this. It also made her acceptance of Oliver more acceptable, it became not a love match, but the suitable marriage that she, as a princess, would have expected to have made anyway. It was an interpretation entirely justified by the text as Celia declares her love openly when she says

.....We still have slept together,



Rose at the same instant, learn'd, play'd, eat  
 together  
 And wherso'er we went, like Juno's swans  
 Still went coupled and inseparable.

(Act1 scene iii)

Later in the same scene she says

No, hath not? Rosalind lacks then the love  
 Which teacheth thee that thou and I are one.

The central problem of the play - whether Orlando recognizes Ganymede as Rosalind was cleverly handled. Adrian Lester, when he saw Orlando in the forest, showed by body language that he wanted to be recognized, standing and making 'look it's me' gestures. Scott Handy, as Orlando, gazed for a moment, then raised his hand in a negative gesture 'I do not want to know it's you' was the unspoken sub-text. As Adrian Lester writes 'why does the momentary joke go on for the rest of the play?. Lester found that it would help his motivation to think of this as a test that Orlando failed - not to recognize her. It is very wounding to Rosalind, and this fuelled her anger (and Lester was a very angry Rosalind). This was the prime motive that helped him make sense of the character. This motivation was discerned by Michael Billington, *Guardian*, 21st January, 1995,

The defining moment comes when he [Lester] first encounters Scott Handy's Orlando in Arden;...he spreads his fingers begging to be recognised as a woman *en travesti*. Crestfallen that he is not, he then launches into the wooing-

game almost as a punitive exercise.

In the small space of the Bouffes du Nord, where the audience encircles the stage and the apron comes out into the encirclement the actors were able to make entrances and exits through the audience. At the Albery many of these were omitted, and, as has been said, those that remained looked awkward. The main advantage of being in the small space was being able to pick up on the nuances of acting - the expressions on people's faces, often when they were not acting. Much of the action at the Bouffes du Nord was pitched forward onto the apron. It has been observed before how the girls' rug was more prominent there, and another instance of the use of the apron was in the Litany of Love. Orlando was lying on the floor with a sheet over him, recovering from his injury, and the others joined him in his 'bed'. At the Albery this was played more centrally and the audience was excluded from the bed. The same sheet was used over wooden blocks for the altar at the wedding, again it was placed more downstage in Paris, thus being included in the encirclement of the audience. As this was primarily a production designed for many theatres the cast did not play specifically to the audience as the small space would have allowed them to. It was not until Rosalind said her Epilogue that she, or anyone else, talked directly to the audience. The commitment of the players was intense at both theatres, but at the Bouffes the actors reached out as if saying 'You, too, are in the Forest of Arden', but in London they failed to energise the space to the same degree. As Jane Edwardes in *Time Out*, 18th January 1995 remarked

Last week audiences left the Bouffes du Nord in Paris glowing with pleasure, not least Peter Brook who was clearly



delighted to be welcoming a company whose guiding principles allied to his own. The Albery doesn't have the same hothouse relationship between actor and audience, but Declan Donnellan's production will surely still be a rare occasion,

Donnellan did not accentuate the hunting song, nor did he bring on the dead stag but the Masque at the end was beautifully and simply staged in common with the rest of the production. Amiens donned a golden mask and wore a simple white tunic, becoming Hymen. Rosalind and Celia wore long white wedding dresses, while Phoebe and Audrey wore short pale yellow dresses. Jacques, who had a painted clown's face throughout left the stage at the end, but then returned to embrace Hymen/Amiens - a movement that again looked contrived in the Albery but natural in the Bouffes. Rosalind's Epilogue concluded the play speaking directly to the audience. Again, at the Bouffes du Nord, she was encircled by the audience, whereas in the Albery she spoke in a picture frame.

As Jeremy Kingston said in *The Times*, 27th January, 1995, the simplicity of this production required the audience to use its imagination. The cast trusted its author and spoke the lines simply and expressively. Irving Wardle, *Independent on Sunday*, 29th January, 1995 summed up the production by saying

This is a blank canvas that gradually fills with action and colour, and you would get the story if you were stone deaf. But there is no separating text and physical invention in projecting the passionate playfulness that is at the heart of the comedy...It is a company

event...[but] at the same time every rôle is strikingly individualised.

That, it is submitted, is the essence not only of good Shakespearian production anywhere, but particularly needed when actors and audience are in close proximity in a small space. Declan Donnellan says that in rehearsal he works to get actors to act at a profound level

...to produce that kind of commitment on stage, trying to involve the actor's imagination like a muscle. (Cook: p 95)

He thinks that the text is all important

Shakespeare is so supremely objective, although we kid ourselves that we can interpret him. (Cook, 1989, p 94)

The differences between the two performances in different types of theatre were due, it is contended, to the position of the actors *vis à vis* the audience. Actors know instinctively the best places on the stage - centre stage in a proscenium arch or open stage theatre because then they can *command* the audience, on an apron stage theatre they have to come into the audience and ask them to participate. This was well demonstrated by the performances as arranged in Paris and in London.



## CONCLUSION

There were, it was submitted in the Introduction, four questions to ask and answer when considering small space productions of Shakespeare's plays. They were:

- 1) Why did this movement come about?
- 2) How do plays performed in small spaces differ from main house performances?
- 3) What are the unique properties of a small space production and how do directors, actors and audiences feel about them?
- 4) Is this movement just a fashionable movement that, maybe, has had its time, as have other fashions in presenting Shakespeare, and is it important to keep it alive?

Many of the answers to these questions have been given in the previous pages, but here, in this conclusion, they will be re-iterated and endorsed.

The small space movement came about as a sociological fashion. With the building of the new universities, in the Sixties, drama as an educational force for young people became an aim, and some of the universities, such as Sussex and Exeter, built small theatres in the

campus. Provincial theatres also built Studio theatres to do experimental work, new plays, or simple productions of classics. As we have seen, the National Theatre ran the Young Vic as an adjunct to its main theatre, and the Royal Shakespeare Company started productions in The Other Place to develop young talent and to tour, at first to schools, and then to places that had no opportunity to see a Shakespeare play. The work in these small spaces, where it has survived, proved to be among the most acclaimed work that the companies did, and with the Trevor Nunn production of *Macbeth* with Judi Dench and Ian McKellen, even leading actors started to work in these spaces, finding them rewarding and excitingly different from working in a main house. It also meant that plays which were not considered box office for the main house, which would only attract small, audiences, could be presented, thus, certainly for the Royal Shakespeare Company, meaning that it could present the whole canon.

For four hundred years Shakespeare has always been performed in all sorts of conditions and in all sorts of places. Even in his own time, the Globe and the Blackfriars theatres, were, different from each other. Succeeding ages presented Shakespeare according to the accepted *mores* and technical equipment of their day, even at the expense of the original text. But why, it can be asked, does theatre exist at all? What is its main purpose, and why have Shakespeare's plays survived and are the most performed? Theatre communicates emotion, and, at its best, communication that is wedded to the human heart and which both gives us pleasure and informs us about ourselves and our dilemmas. It is a communication that has to be done with enthusiasm and energy on the part of the communicators (writers, directors, designers and actors) and received with equal enthusiasm and energy on the part of the audience. This enthusiasm is not



necessarily noisy and boisterous - there is a kind of joy in being harrowed by tragedy and softened by romance, as Aristotle knew and expressed in the *Poetics*. Audiences are as much part of theatre as what happens on the stage. The quality of an audience's listening and its response can inspire and drive the actors to new discoveries and emotions. The text, delivered as it was written is the actors' task, or else the writer's intention is lost, but this text can be, and is, enlightened by the actor and director. It becomes the actor's own in performance, but the audience can change that interpretation. That is an actor can feel that the audience does not respond to a line as he intended, and a good actor will then question whether he has responded to the text as he should. The text has to become part of his imagination which informs his voice and his body to sound and move as the character which he is playing. It is a transformation that has to be both true to life and also to be beyond it, for theatre is concerned with art as well as life. In a play, all that is known about a character is already, and only, on the page. The actor by his imagination, voice and gestures makes the audience believe that he is that character. Detail is important, and Peter Brook, in his works, says that it is the details that lead us to the heart of the mystery as what is the essence of theatre.

But the audience is an important part. No play can be considered complete until it is performed with an audience. Actors will say that there comes a time in rehearsal when they need an audience to see whether the performance works, for actors and audience collude in a performance. The audience, nowadays, sits in the dark, though in Elizabethan times, when these plays were written, most performances took place in the open air, and there the audience was visible to the actors. Audiences are made up of separate people who have come

to experience a performance in the company of other people. Sharing the experience is part of the performance - a sharing between the separate members of the audience who become one and the sharing of that community with the actors. Audience members are aware of each other, actors are aware of audience. The awareness of other people can intensify the experience of a member of the audience, and an awareness of the audience can intensify the actor's performance. Most people have had the experience of laughing aloud in the cinema at a film, which, when they view it alone at home they have not laughed at all, though the joke had been enjoyed inwardly. A 'good house' that is one that responds quickly and with empathy to the actors produces the better performance. The audience knows that it is watching some people in strange clothes, saying strange words, in a place where time and space are different from time and space outside the theatre, yet, at the same time it is experiencing something that is just as real as what is going on outside. The audience is constantly aware that it is watching both something both real and unreal. The actors, guided by the director, are using their imagination and skills to recreate in the audience's collective mind an emotional and intellectual response that will enrich and enchant them. Watching a play by Shakespeare there are, inevitably, in the audience people who have great knowledge of the plays and will judge this production against others that they have seen: there are people who have come, not because they want to, but for social reasons: children who are getting up a text for an examination, as well as people from other cultures who recognize the genius of Shakespeare.

But something else is happening. The actors and the audience are also colluding with the writer, in this case, Shakespeare, to retell the story and the emotions contained in the text. Thus, they make a greater



experience than that which is on the page. In a lecture given in Cambridge, circa 1930, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein expressed this experience using music as an example

...the relation between a musical score and a performance cannot be grasped causally (as though we find, mysteriously, that a certain score *causes* us to play in a certain way), nor can the rules that connect the two be exhaustively described - for, given a certain interpretation, any playing can be made to accord with the score. Eventually, we just have to 'see the rule in the relations between playing and score'. If we cannot see it, no amount of explanation is going to make it comprehensible; if we can see, then there comes a point at which explanations are superfluous - we do not need any kind of 'fundamental' explanation. (Monk, 1990, p302)

This argument of Wittgenstein's is particularly true of the plays of Shakespeare. Instinct as well as knowledge has to inform the text. And it is the text which is the most important. In presenting the plays of Shakespeare, actors have to deal with a special text - a text which, especially in the later plays, is dense, complex and demanding. They are, arguably, the best plays in the language, both for the beauty and richness of the language, but also for the emotions they express. What Shakespeare needs is energetic, committed acting by the whole company who can command the texts and make them their own. These plays tell magnificent stories, they are plays where language and

story-telling are melded together: they concern fascinating characters and are plays where even the tiniest parts add to the whole. It has been argued by past scholars that the proper place to study Shakespeare's plays is in the study only, but this, though rewarding, is to ignore the author's own intention and the origin of the plays. What, too, is unique about these plays is how little scenic help they need. Although directors and designers can, and do, embellish the plays, giving them naturalistic settings, all we need to know is in the text. What has been written above, of course, applies to any production of Shakespeare wherever it is done. But it is the contention of this thesis that the plays become more accessible, more exciting, more true to the original intentions if done in a small space, with a minimum of scenery, and where the audience's imagination is more fully engaged.

Peter Brook believes that to create something of quality all that is needed is an empty space, and that will make us see the plays in a new light.

An empty space makes it possible for a new phenomenon to come to life, for anything that touches on content, meaning, expression, language and music can exist only if the experience is fresh and new. (Brook, 1995, p 4)

and he further believes that

Theatre is always both a searching for meaning and a way of making this meaning



meaningful for others. (Brook, 1995, 75)

It can be argued that meaningful does not depend on elaboration of scenery, but faithful adherence to the text which must be understood by the actor intellectually and in his body. Peter Brook also contends that an empty space makes an audience participate by using its 'Imagination, attention and thought processes' (same source) in a free and unfettered way for they are not distracted by scenery, and that in such a small space all difficulties about place and time disappear. He writes of an experience that he and his company had

During our travels...all we would take was a small carpet that defined the area on which we would work. It was through this that we experienced the technical basis of Shakespearian theatre. We saw that the best way to study Shakespeare was not to examine reconstructions of Elizabethan theatres, but simply to do improvisations around a carpet. We realized that it was possible to begin a scene standing, ending it by sitting down and in standing up again find oneself in another country, at another time, without losing the tempo of the story. In Shakespeare, there are scenes where two people are walking in an enclosed space and suddenly find themselves in the open without any noticeable break. One part of the scene is indoors, another outdoors, without any indication of the point at which the transition occurs. (Brook, 1995, pp28/9)

Small space theatre, though more prone to use scenery and not just be content with Brook's carpet, need not be elaborate theatre. Any attempt to use complex scenery as has been done recently at the Swan, [for example in *The Devil is an Ass*] seems unnecessary. The space itself has an eloquence of its own, as has the Almeida, and the Bouffes du Nord, while others such as the Young Vic and The Other Place have a pleasing neutrality. In them, plays can be done with the scenic simplicity that pertained in Shakespeare's day, and which, even today, does not suggest any impoverishment, for the text embellishes the space.

Throughout this thesis it has been contended that the audience is an important and potent force in the performance of a play, and the effect of the actor in being in close proximity with an audience has been, to many of them a revelation which has strengthened their work. Bruce Myers told Peter Brook

'I've spent ten years of my life in the professional theatre, without ever seeing the people for whom I'm doing this work. Suddenly I can see them. A year ago, I would have been panicked by the feeling of nakedness. The most important of my defences was being taken away. I'd have thought "What a nightmare to see their faces". [Brook then comments] Suddenly he realised that, on the contrary, *seeing the spectators gave a new meaning to his work.* Another aspect of the empty space is that the emptiness is shared: *it's the same space for everyone who is present.* (my itals) (Brook, 1995, pp5/6)



An empty space, as Brook calls it, a studio theatre, a small space theatre, has this sharing and awareness. It makes for an intimacy which is lacking in a proscenium arch theatre, an open space theatre or even an apron stage theatre that is above the audience. By putting the actors on a high stage, they are instantly put on view in a way that they are not in a theatre in which audience and actors share the same, or almost the same, floor level. The Bouffes du Nord, which started life as a pros arch theatre, has no raised stage. We do not, of course, know what height the Elizabethan stage was, though the authorities of the Globe Theatre in Southwark say that five feet off the ground is the correct architectural balanced height (conversation with researcher) but if an audience looks at the actors who are more or less as they would be in real life, then, it is submitted, the effect is more intimate.

That small space theatre is enjoyed by directors, actors and audiences alike is evident in what they say and write. Early on in discussion with Michael Reardon, the architect of the Swan, Trevor Nunn made it clear that he wanted a space 'in which the audience and the actors were inhabitants of the the same space, living in the same world' (*Shakespeare Survey* 47:p 118) and in discussing *The Other Place* with Paul Lapworth, (*Stratford Herald*, 6th and 13th September, 1991,) Nunn called it 'the conscience of the RSC'. He considered, that while design style changes in the Main House at Stratford and in large scale work, there is a danger that the investigation of character and meaning become secondary to the design: at *The Other Place* character and meaning have to have prior importance. Following from this, it can be seen that the very paucity of design in small spaces can make, and indeed does make, the actors and audiences consider the text more deeply

than in larger productions with prominent design concepts. Nunn developed this thought (same source) by saying

The investigation of a Shakespeare text you undertake within the small space is a process of discovery of what truths the text contains, the truthfulness of human behaviour, truths in philosophical conclusions. The entire process is to do with eradicating what is false, removing all things phoney, and thereby disallowing the stylistic accretions of centuries, and certainly [removing] the bulk of large Shakespearian production of this century and its presentational style.

In other words, a small space imposes a simplicity of style and faithfulness to the text that was prevalent in Shakespeare's day but which, subsequently was lost in spectacular productions in which the text was heavily cut.

Nunn also recognizes that the participation of the audience in a small space is different from that in a large theatre. In *The Times*, 27th August, 1991, he said

The audience can hear them [the actors] breathing and believes it can hear them thinking. All kinds of unexpected truths begin to emerge, all kinds of details and fluctuations of language...



Other directors agree with Nunn. Some of them, at first, found the Swan daunting. John Caird, (director of *Every Man in His Humour* and *The New Inn* ) for example, does not think it a unifying space as not all the audience sees the same stage picture at the same time. Although he says that you cannot treat the space in the same way as you can a Victorian theatre, he has not realized that this disunity of sight means that the audience is seeing the action as they would see it in real life. To view a production in the Swan from one of the balconies, is to see it as one would from a balcony overlooking the street in one's own house. Caird concedes, though, that he thinks some Elizabethan plays (he cites Ben Jonson) work better in a small space because the players need

...an audience's close proximity because practically everything that Jonson wrote relies on recognition, and for an audience that means recognition of the finest details of human behaviour...Jonson believes that theatre should pertain to reality in a precise way...(Mulryne and Shewring, 1989: p 67)

This is a curious comment for Caird, who obviously likes working in a larger space, seems to imply that Shakespeare does not need detail and precision. Shakespeare represented the 'finest details of human behaviour' in no less a real way than Jonson, while his characters have more substance and recognition of the finer points of humanity.

Barry Kyle (director of *The Jew of Malta*) another director who seems, at first, to have had difficulty in

working in the Swan, says that you cannot ignore that theatre's auditorium

You do a play in there and a play has its own needs and requirements, but the *theatre's* requirements are very loud, and you can't tone it down, I rejoice in that...I can't think of any theatre in which I enjoy directing in more. (Mulryne and Shrewing, 1989,p 74)

A director and a designer who are most enthusiastic about small spaces are Declan Donellan and Nick Omerod (Cheek by Jowl) who told Ronnie Mulryne that

Our favourite spaces are the Cottesloe...which we've worked in a lot, and the Bouffes du Nord in Paris. The Cottesloe provides an intimacy (in terms of the distance between actor and audience) and two, it provides an epic dimension as well...the nature of the space and its flexibility allows you to use the theatre in an epic way, *but maintaining an intimacy which we believe theatre absolutely requires.*[my italics] (Mulryne and Shewring ,1995,p 104)

Donellan criticizes the Pit as not being high enough, thus hemming in the action too much. Both he and Omerod believe that awareness of one member of the audience of other members is important and that it should be possible to see other people sitting elsewhere in the audience. It is essential, they think, that they feel that they are *in* an audience and that is a



condition more attainable in a small space. Donnellan also argues that an actor should be able to see the audience for this makes for intimacy between it and the actors. He also is of the opinion that elaborate sets are redundant in a theatre such as the Swan.

Once actors get used to seeing the audience and working in close proximity with it, they seem to enjoy working in a small space. It is true, as Toby Stephens said, they have to learn to use the space. Unlike a proscenium arch stage, where the acting is frontal, especially for soliloquies and important speeches, the actor in a small space environment has to turn his body and his face to address different parts of the audience. The only place he can command the whole audience is centre up stage, that is, farthest away from most of the audience. But actors (and directors ) soon adapt to this and learn to include the whole audience, somehow, even with backs turned to some of them. According to Declan Donnellan and also some actors, including Michael Pennington, what makes a performance work is energy. As Donnellan said

Any actor can be *heard* in a two thousand seat theatre. But the more you increase volume, and the cubic metres of space the actor has to energise , the more you *increase the blandness of the performance*. That is what is so terrible...Those [large] spaces often force young actors into giving performances of sufficient blandness and crudity that they will carry, whereas in something smaller but more subtle *won't* necessarily carry. Directors too feel that [they] have to do their *Hamlet* on a

huge stage in order to prove themselves.  
[my italics] (Mulryne and Shewring,1995,  
p106)

Michael Pennington (Bogdanov and Pennington,1992,p 81) opines that 'energetic, committed ensemble' playing is needed to produce the best Shakespeare performances. Derek Jacobi is another actor who talks about energizing and thinks that actors 'feel free to use their emotions and imaginations to the full in intimate spaces' (Mulryne and Shewring,1995,p 110). Simon Russell Beale, who in years with the Royal Shakespeare Company, from 1988 to 1994, played most of his parts in the Swan, The Other Place and the Pit, including Thersites, Richard III, Marlowe's Edward III, several parts in the Restoration Season, Konstantin in *The Cherry Orchard*, and Oswald in *Ghosts*. He says that the joy of working in a small space is that the presence of the audience is immensely important

...actors...use the same entrance as the audience...I love all the informal things that happen. You have to wait for your entrance in the secretary's office. And the sense of sharing [with an audience] is very strong. (Mulryne and Shewring,1995,p 107)

Juliet Stevenson makes the interesting comment that in rehearsal actors do the play in a very small community and create a world within the four walls of the rehearsal room and moving to a large space can destroy some of the work, because one of the four walls has been removed. In a small space the audience is *contained within* the four walls. The audience has been invited into it and feel more privileged to be there than it



does in a large theatre where it is placed outside the action.

Tony Church feels that the actors in a small space have a 'cabaret-style actor-audience ' relationship

Basically the Swan has an active relationship with the audience...the acoustic is live. You can't shout in the Swan...It's also good to be really quiet...It's a very demanding house in terms of verbal control - it needs absolutely crisp and dead accurate articulation. (Mulryne and Shewring, 1989, p 103)

This is a quality that is also needed in other small spaces. Because the space is small, this does not mean that diction can be sloppy, though it can be quiet. Perhaps because the pitch is nearer to normal, the actors should be more conscious in their speech than when they are striving to reach the back of a large theatre. This concentration also adds to the intensity of a performance in a large space.

Jeremy Irons, who played in the Swan in Aphra Benn's *The Rover* says that you can communicate with a wink of an eye there, but that actors need a lot of what he calls 'swirl' to inhabit the space. Imogen Stubbs (who played in *Two Noble Kinsmen* in the Swan and Desdemona in *The Other Place*) feels more exposed in a small space, and realizes that the actors need to work with more precision so that the action does not go fuzzy. She finds that entrances and exits are more difficult to manage. Stubbs, of course, makes a valuable point here

(Mulryne and Shewring ,1989,p 109). A thrust or courtyard stage does alter the way an actor has to get into character and move. Entrances through the audience, or around the audience, do need a different technique as they are suddenly thrust into an audience instead of appearing before them. As Russell Beale said it does add to the intimacy for both actors and audiences. The octogen<sup>er</sup>ian Griffiths Jones seems to delight in this intimacy and rapport in a small space (conversation with researcher). It means that he can go on acting for he can conserve his energy in a small space for the performance is not dissipated by having to project into a cavernous space, but can be held inwardly to energize the part and the human relationships being played to the benefit of the performance.

That critics admire small scale productions of Shakespeare is evident from the quotations made in the body of this text. Indeed, in reading the Press Books of the Young Vic and Royal Shakespeare Company and *Theatre Record* it is difficult to find adverse comments about the use of small spaces. It was also interesting to find how easily critics settle into viewing productions in small spaces. When a small space is first opened, the critics comment on it and the use the production makes of the space. As they get used to it and presume that their readers also know the space they cease to make statements about it . Even with the more epic plays such as *Hamlet* and *Othello* remarks about the use of space are rare, and the notices are mainly about acting and production. Small scale performance/ of Shakespeare are among the most highly praised of all Shakespearean productions.

Audience appreciation is more difficult to gauge. For many productions in small spaces tickets are difficult to get, which supports the argument that audiences are



keen to see these performances. In the case of *Othello* the tickets were sold out to the Mailing List subscribers, as they were for *King Lear* at the Cottesloe (1997) and tickets are generally sold out in all the venues on the small scale tour. The Tom Patterson Theatre is another venue where tickets are hard to come by and the Donmar is nearly always sold out. What might be called 'the Charles Ross observation' (see Introduction) seems to be correct for small scale audiences react in this way, holding their hands high when applauding, and conversations overheard in the interval are generally buzzing with excitement. These two phenomena happen in large scale theatres, too, but the consistency of these reactions in small scale theatre is very high. A contagion seems to spread from actors to audience very quickly, and far from proving distracting, seeing other people's emotions across the space seems to increase the emotion felt by everyone. This might seem subjective comment, but it is the result of watching audiences and talking to Shakespearian scholars as well as ordinary members of the audience in the intervals and after a performance for more than twenty years. What most people seem to say is that the simplicity of the production values allows greater concentration on text and character. Indeed, it might be argued that the more money spent on scenery and costumes, the farther away is the realisation of the play, which should be allowed to speak for itself. Germaine Greer, writing in the *Evening Standard*, 22nd May, 1997, about the reconstructed Globe theatre says that

Everything makes sense if the audience is undeniably there. When the audience surrounds the action, it becomes the air the actors breathe. If the audience's breathing rhythm changes, the throb of the action has to change with it...When

the audience suck in their collective breath, you feel it. When they relax again, the air perceptibly warms.

The Globe, of course, is not a small space within the meaning of this thesis, but, if even here, a member of the audience feels the performance is more dynamic because of the awareness between actors and audience and the collective reactions, then, it is contended, the same dynamism applies to an even smaller space. This, of course, means that all Shakespeare's plays can be enjoyed in a small space. In fact, most of them have, without any seeming loss of emotion or impact to judge from the critics. The clarity of the text is often commented upon by them and the fact that the stories come over with a greater intensity than in a large theatre.

If these productions are so successful why then do we not have more of them? The answer is economic. Although companies are unwilling to give exact details it seems that twenty to twenty-five thousand pounds (as against upwards of eighty thousand pounds on a large scale production) is spent on a production and it is difficult to re-coup even this amount. Running costs (salaries, lighting, front-of-house expenses) are still considerable and very much the same as in a larger house. So unless the Company has a subsidy, an Arts Council grant, a British Council grant for touring overseas, or sponsorship it is difficult for it to sustain a small space as well as its larger theatre. In the Sixties, provincial theatres regarded their small scale work as important, now it is rare for them to do a large cast play in them, even if the small space is used at all. The Bristol Old Vic, for example, has not done a Shakespeare play in its studio for a number of years. The Gardiner Theatre (Sussex University) seems only to



be used for plays during the Brighton Festival (if at all). The Royal Shakespeare Company, while committed to more touring generally, has only sent out one Shakespeare play a year during the period covered by this thesis. The Young Vic, who originally used to do three or four productions of Shakespeare every year, has in the last few years only done his plays in conjunction with the Royal Shakespeare Company, or in the case of *Timon of Athens* with considerable underwriting by sponsors. While there is more touring of Shakespeare's plays than, perhaps, there has been in this century, they are by companies who visit large theatres. Cheek by Jowl, English Shakespeare Company, Oxford Playhouse Company, English Touring Theatre all visit theatres such as the Opera House at Buxton, The Playhouse at Oxford, the Lyceum at Crewe. Northern Broadsides do play in 'found' places, such as a mill or a brewery, but these have to be large spaces with larger audiences because of economics. And, as we have seen, the RSC now wants a guarantee of around £30,000 from Town Councils for its small scale tour, in spite of it also being sponsored.

It is a submission of this thesis that small scale theatre should not be allowed to die. It is the only chance that some people living in remote districts, away from any other theatre, have of seeing a Shakespeare production at all. But small scale productions should be kept for themselves alone as they are a dynamic way of presenting Shakespeare's plays. As Harley Granville Barker said at the beginning of the century we cannot present plays as the Elizabethans did because we are not Elizabethans, and also we are used to greater technical facilities than they had. Today, though, we are in danger of destroying his text, not only because of the greater technical advances, but, also, because directors think that their interpretation or concept is more important than the words on the page.

As has been seen by the comments made by directors in

this thesis, working in a small space makes them concentrate on the text, as they have to keep their production values simple. This leads to an emphasis on story-telling, precision of detail, and revelations about human emotions and relationships. It also initiates a different type of relationship with the audience, a more intimate and more emotional one. Ian McKellen speaks (Barton, 1984, p 185) of the text being 'released' in a small space, and that the emotions expressed in a dazzling language conveying human relations is so supreme in Shakespeare. Perhaps Michael Pennington expresses it best of all when he writes (Bogdanov and Pennington, 1992, p 240) that for an actor language, in the end, is the sustaining miracle. If this is true for the actors it is also true for the audience, for, however weary, however unreceptive it feels when entering a theatre, the language can and does overwhelm and sustain it. In a small space where the emotion transmitted is more immediate, more human in scale: where contagion between members of the audience is quicker and deeper: where the action is shared in a way that is unique and stronger than in a proscenium arch theatre, the magic of Shakespeare is released more potently for both directors, actors and audiences, as has been seen by the quotations contained herein. To be true to the text should be the aim of all directors and actors of Shakespeare wherever he is performed, but in a small space, it is contended, the text can become the focal point of the production, rather than, as is often the case in a larger theatre, the presentation itself. Being in an audience of a small space production can mean greater concentration from both audience and actors, for it is a shared event, for they are both contained in a small room, can hear each other breathe, almost, as Trevor Nunn thinks, hear each other think. It would be a reflection on the directors of companies if they let this vital and exhilarating form of production disappear.



This thesis has not set out to be contentious. It has set out as accurately as possible the growth of the small scale theatre which for over twenty-five years has been among the most vital forces in Shakespeare production. It is a movement which has put emphasis on the text, simplicity of production values, and which the audience comes out of the space thinking about the play, not discussing the frocks. Audiences, who are wrapped round the stage, who are addressed by the actors, who are taken into the actors' thoughts, have to play their part instead of sitting back and being amused: they are required to use their imaginations, to respond to the actors' demands, and to listen without being distracted. This is what audiences, I submit, experience in small scale productions. In proscenium arch theatre the gaze is compelled to focus on remote figures separated from the audience, the actors seeming the smaller of the two, and their impact being dispersed while in the small spaces the actor is seen as a life-sized body speaking a text on which the audience can concentrate and the words become intrusive and compelling.

As Dennis Kennedy has written

The chamber Shakespeare movement...may be the most consequential development for classic plays in recent time. It gathers together a hundred years of Shakespearean concerns about intimacy of playing, the importance of non-illusionist setting, and the shape of performance space. (Kennedy: p 256)

And the language has been made important again.

## APPENDICES

1. List of Shakespeare Productions seen by Joy Leslie Gibson
2. List of Small Space Productions by the Royal Shakespeare Company
3. List of major Shakespeare Productions at the Young Vic
4. Letters from Financial Directors and Production Budget of *The Winter's Tale* at the Young Vic
5. Letters about sizes of Acting Areas
6. Letters from Actors - Barry Foster: Adrian Lester: David Suchet.
7. Correspondence with Trevor Nunn's Office: Notes on *Timon of Athens*
8. Directors' Notes
9. Letter from National Opinion Poll



## APPENDIX 1

LIST OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS  
SEEN BY JOY LESLIE GIBSON  
IN SMALL SPACES  
SINCE 1976

1992 - THE SWAN

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL - Director: Peter Hall

1995 - THÉÂTRE DES BOUFFES DU NORD

AS YOU LIKE IT - Director: Declan Donellan

1994 - THE SWAN

CORIOLANUS - Director: David Thacker

1987 - THE OTHER PLACE (original building)

CYMBELINE - Director: Bill Alexander

1994 - THE DONMAR

HAMLET - Director: Stanley Unwin

1994 - THE TOM PATTERSON THEATRE

HAMLET - Director: Richard Monette

1979 - STEWART MELVILLE HALL (RSC Tour)

1 & 2 HENRY 1V - Director: Bill Alexander

1988 - THE OTHER PLACE (original building)

KING JOHN - Director: Deborah Warner

1994 - THE OTHER PLACE (new building)

3 HENRY 1V - Director: Katie Mitchell



1976 - THE WAREHOUSE

MACBETH - Director: Trevor Nunn

1993 - BRIDGE LANE THEATRE

MACBETH - Director: Stephen Rayne

1978 - THE OTHER PLACE (original building)

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE - Director: John Barton

1991 - THE OTHER PLACE (new building) and  
YOUNG VIC

MEASURE FOR MEASURE - Director: Trevor Nunn

1993 - THE LILIAN BAYLIS THEATRE

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM - Director: Stanley  
Unwin

1993 - THE PIT

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

1989 -YOUNG VIC

OTHELLO - Director: Trevor Nunn

1989 - THE SWAN

PERICLES - Director: David Thacker

1995 - THE COTTESLOE

RICHARD 11 - Director: Deborah Warner

1992 - THE OTHER PLACE (new building) and

1993 - THE SWAN

RICHARD 111 - Director: Sam Mendes

1994 - BUBBLE THEATRE in a TENT ON RICHMOND GREEN

ROMEO AND JULIET - Director: Jonathan  
Petherbridge

1994 - THE PIT

ROMEO AND JULIET - Director: Rena Yerushalmi

1994 - THE SWAN

THE TEMPEST - Director: David Thacker

1980 - THE OTHER PLACE (original building)

TIMON OF ATHENS - Director: Ron Daniels

1991 - YOUNG VIC

TIMON OF ATHENS - Director: Trevor Nunn

1978 - STEWART MELVILLE HALL, Edinburgh (RSC  
Tour)

TWELFTH NIGHT - Director: John Amiel

1991 - THE SWAN

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA - Director: David Thacker

1986 - THE SWAN

TWO NOBLE KINSMEN - Director: Barry Kyle

1991 - YOUNG VIC

THE WINTER'S TALE - Director: David Thacker



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## APPENDIX 2

LIST OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS  
PRODUCED AT THE OTHER PLACE  
1974 - 1993

1974 KING LEAR (a cut version for schools)  
Director: Buzz Goodbody

1975 HAMLET - Director: Buzz Goodbody

1976 MACBETH - Director: Trevor Nunn

1978 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE - Director: John  
Barton

1979 PERICLES - Director: Ron Daniels

1980 &

1981 TIMON OF ATHENS - Director Ron Daniels

1984 ROMEO AND JULIET - Director: John Caird

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM - Director:  
Sheila Hancock

1987 CYMBELINE - Director: Bill Alexander

1988 KING JOHN - Director: Deborah Warner

KING LEAR - Director: Cicely Berry

1989 OTHELLO - Director: Trevor Nunn

1991 MEASURE FOR MEASURE - Director: Trevor Nunn



1992 JULIUS CAESAR - Director: David Thacker

RICHARD III - Director: Sam Mendes

1993 3 HENRY VI - Director Katie Mitchell

LIST OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS  
PRODUCED AT THE SWAN THEATRE  
1986 - 1995

1986 TWO NOBLE KINSMEN - Director: Barry Kyle

1987 TITUS ANDRONICUS - Director: Deborah Warner

1989 ROMEO AND JULIET - Director: Terry Hands

PERICLES- Director: David Thacker

1990 TROILUS AND CRESSIDA - Director: Sam Mendes

1991 TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA - Director: David  
Thacker

1992 ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL - Director: Peter  
Hall

1993 RICHARD III - Director: Sam Mendes  
(transfer from THE OTHER PLACE and Tour)

1994 CORIOLANUS- Director: David Thacker

1995 THE TEMPEST - Director: David Thacker



## OTHER SMALL SPACES USED BY THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

STEWART MELVILLE HALL, EDINBURGH

WHITBREAD FLOWERS WAREHOUSE, STRATFORD

THE WAREHOUSE, AFTERWARDS THE DONMAR, LONDON

THE ROUND HOUSE, LONDON

THE YOUNG VIC, LONDON

THE ALMEIDA, LONDON

The Company regularly transfers some of its small space productions to the Gulbenkian Studio, Newcastle.

## APPENDIX 3



LIST OF PRINCIPAL PRODUCTIONS  
OF SHAKESPEARE AT THE YOUNG  
VIC, THE CUT, LONDON: 1970 -  
1995

- 1970 THE TAMING OF THE SHREW - Director: Frank Dunlop
- 1971 MEASURE FOR MEASURE - Director: Roland Joffé  
COMEDY OF ERRORS - Director: Frank Dunlop  
ROMEO AND JULIET - Director: Peter James
- 1972 JULIUS CAESAR - Director: Peter James
- 1973 MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING - Director: Frank Dunlop
- 1975 MACBETH - Director: Frank Dunlop  
TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA - Director: Jeremy James Taylor  
OTHELLO - Director: Alfred Lynch
- 1976 AS YOU LIKE IT - Director: Alfred Lynch  
ANTHONY AND CLEOPATRA - Director: Frank Dunlop
- 1977 ROMEO AND JULIET - Director: Denise Coffey
- 1978 TWELFTH NIGHT - Director: Nancy Meckler  
RICHARD III - Director: Michael Bogdanov  
HAMLET - Director: Michael Bogdanov  
THE TEMPEST - Director: Michael Bogdanov

- 1979 THE MERCHANT OF VENICE - Director: Michael Attenborough
- 1980 KING LEAR - Director: Frank Dunlop
- 1981 RICHARD 11 - Director: Robin Lefevre  
THE WINTER'S TALE - Director: Hugh Hunt
- 1982 KING LEAR - Director: Andrew Robinson  
ROMEO AND JULIET - Director: Andrew Visnevski  
HAMLET - Director: Terry Palmer  
OTHELLO - Director: Hugh Hunt  
THE MERCHANT OF VENICE - Director: David Henry
- 1983 ANTHONY AND CLEOPATRA - Director: Keith Hack  
TWELFTH NIGHT - Director: Denise Coffey
- 1984 OTHELLO - Director: David Thacker  
MACBETH - Director: David Thacker
- 1985 HAMLET - Director: David Thacker  
MEASURE FOR MEASURE - Director: David Thacker
- 1986 ROMEO AND JULIET - Director: David Thacker  
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM - Director: David Thacker  
JULIUS CAESAR - Director: David Thacker
- 1989 CORIOLANUS - Director: Jane Howell
- 1991 THE WINTER'S TALE - Director: David Thacker



The list has been compiled from *Paperback Theatre: Das Young Vic und seine Bedeutang für das englische Theater* by Maria Zettner and published by Peter Lang, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 1993, and by the researcher who is the Honorary Archivist of the Young Vic. It does not include revivals of the same play by the same director in following years. It only includes productions instigated by the Young Vic Management and does not include plays presented by the Royal Shakespeare Company, nor those done by the main company of The National Theatre.

## APPENDIX 4



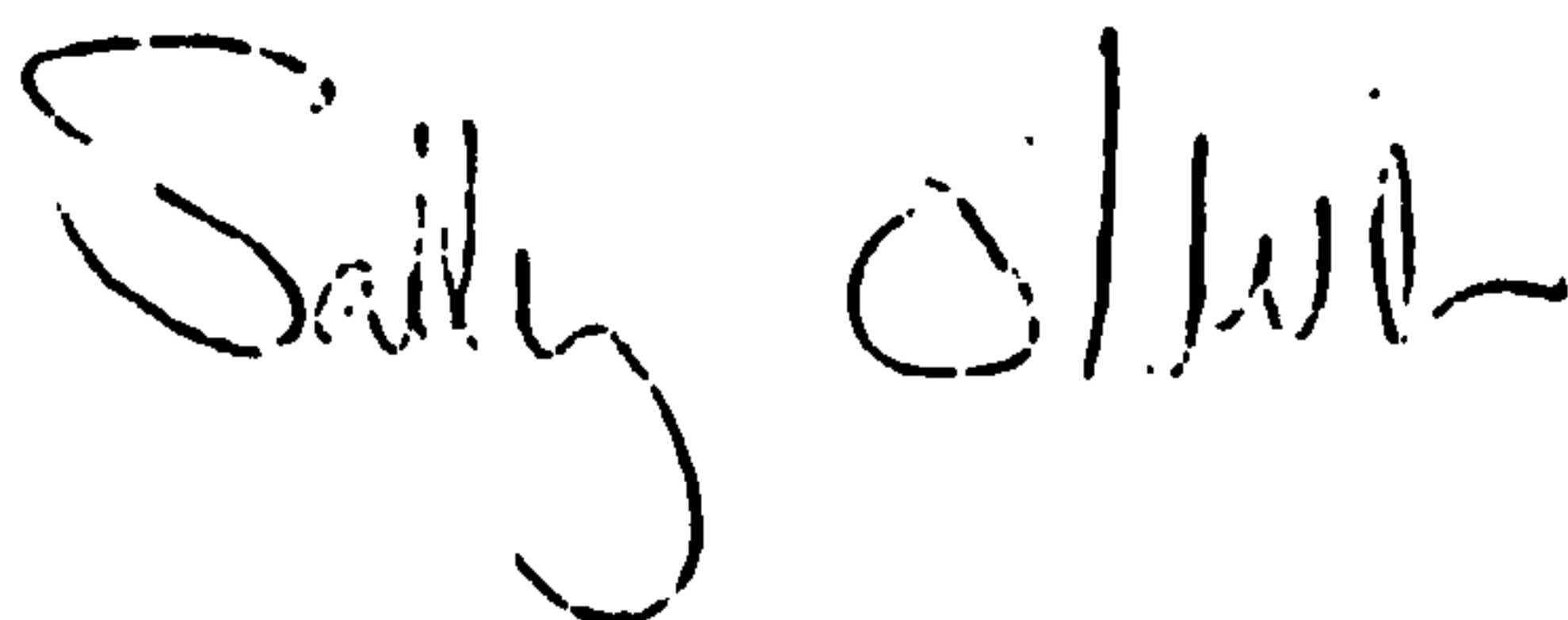
27 October 1995

Joy Leslie Gibson  
36 Rosary Gardens  
London  
SW7 4NT

Dear Joy Leslie,

In reply to your letter of 21 October I can confirm that the average cost of a Cottesloe production is £25,000. This cost covers construction of all sets (materials and labour), costumes, props (made and bought), sound, light, scenic, armoury and metalwork.

Yours sincerely,



Sally O'Neill  
Financial Controller

8 December 1995

Joy Leslie Gibson,  
36 Rosary Gardens,  
London SW7 4NT

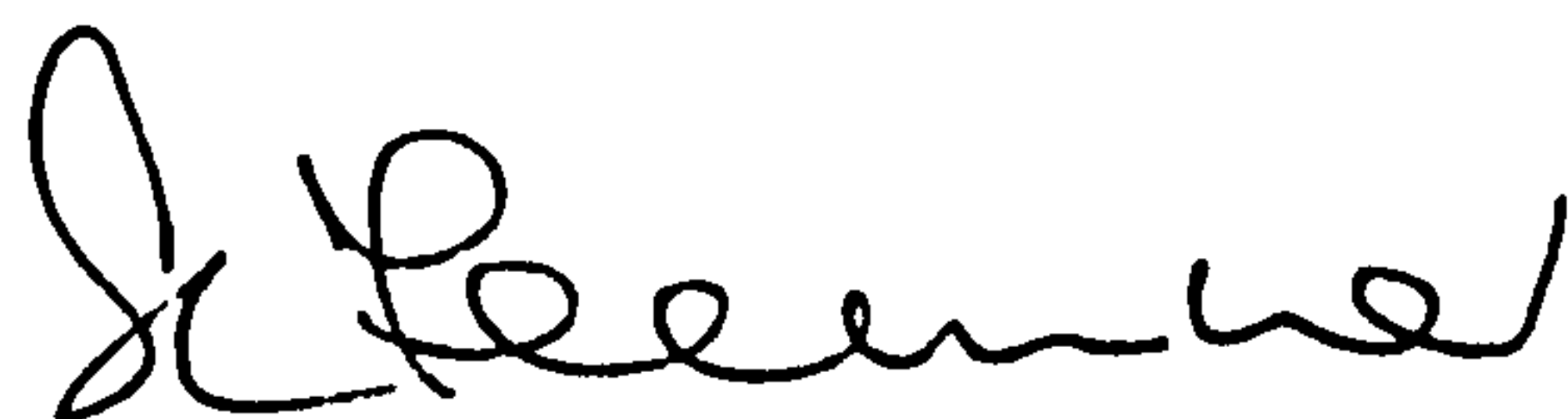
Dear Ms Gibson,

Thank you for your letter of 21st October 1995. I am so sorry to be so late in replying.

I am sorry to say that I am not going to be able to supply you with the information that you want. The issue of production costs is a very complex one which varies from company to company. We are, as a matter of principle, not happy about releasing production information because it requires so much back-up information by way of context in order for the figure to be clearly understood. Without that context, production cost figures are easily misinterpreted and can lead to unnecessary aggravation!

I am sorry I cannot be of more help, but good luck with your thesis.

Yours sincerely,



**DAVID FLETCHER**  
Head of Finance

**PATRON**  
Her Majesty The Queen

**PRESIDENT**  
His Royal Highness  
The Prince of Wales

**CHAIRMAN OF THE  
COUNCIL**

Sir Geoffrey Cass

**VICE CHAIRMEN**

Charles T Flower  
Professor Stanley Wells

**ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**  
Adrian Noble

**EXECUTIVE PRODUCER**  
Michael Attenborough

**GENERAL MANAGER**  
David Brierley

**ADVISORY DIRECTION**  
John Barton

Peter Brook  
Terry Hands  
Trevor Nunn

**Royal Shakespeare Theatre**  
Stratford-upon-Avon  
Warwickshire CV37 6BB  
Telephone: 01789 296655  
Box Office: 01789 295623  
Fax: 01789 294810



Ms. Joy Leslie Gibson  
36 Rosary Gardens  
London  
SW7 4NT

Dear Ms. Gibson:

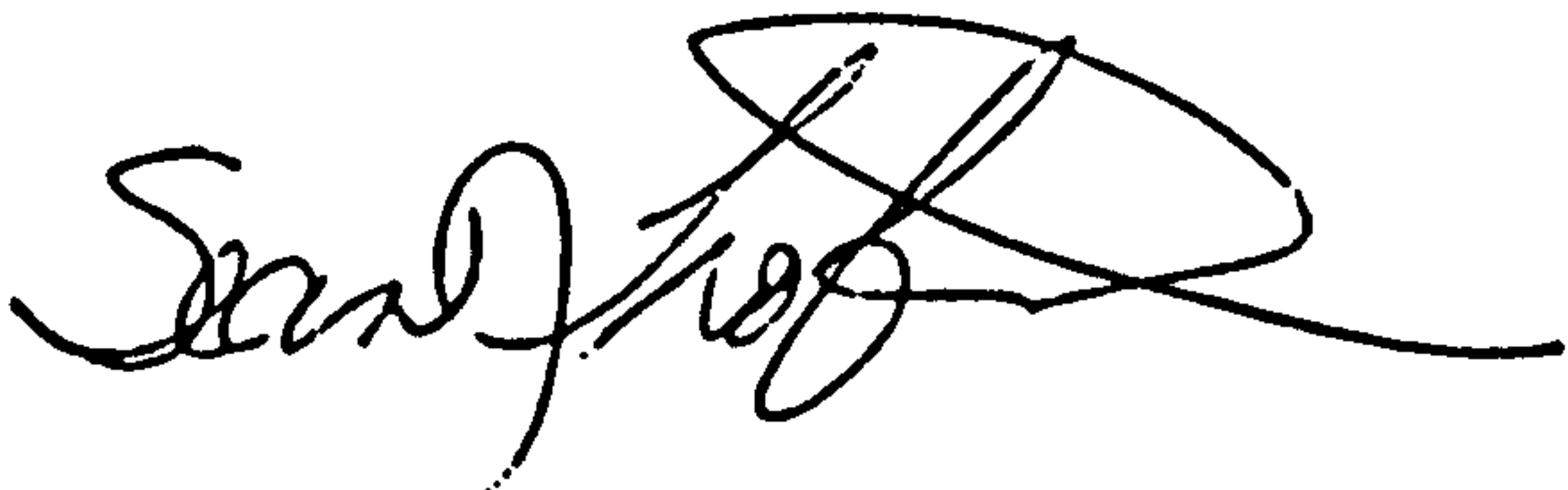
Thank you for your letter and cheque.

I am pleased to send you the reviews of the 1994 production of *Hamlet*, however because of the confidential nature of the Festival's budgets I am unable to send you a copy of the show budget.

Confidential files are opened after ten years, so if you are still interested in the year 2004, you may certainly ask for them then (I don't think that will help you now, though).

If there is anything else you would like, please write again.

Sincerely,



Sean Trofin  
Exhibitions Co-ordinator

p.s.: I am now working at the Festival in another capacity, but I will still be pleased to help you in any way.

Joy Leslie Gibson  
36 Rosary Gardens  
London SW7 4NT

November 8th 1995

Dear Ms Gibson,

Many thanks for your second letter.

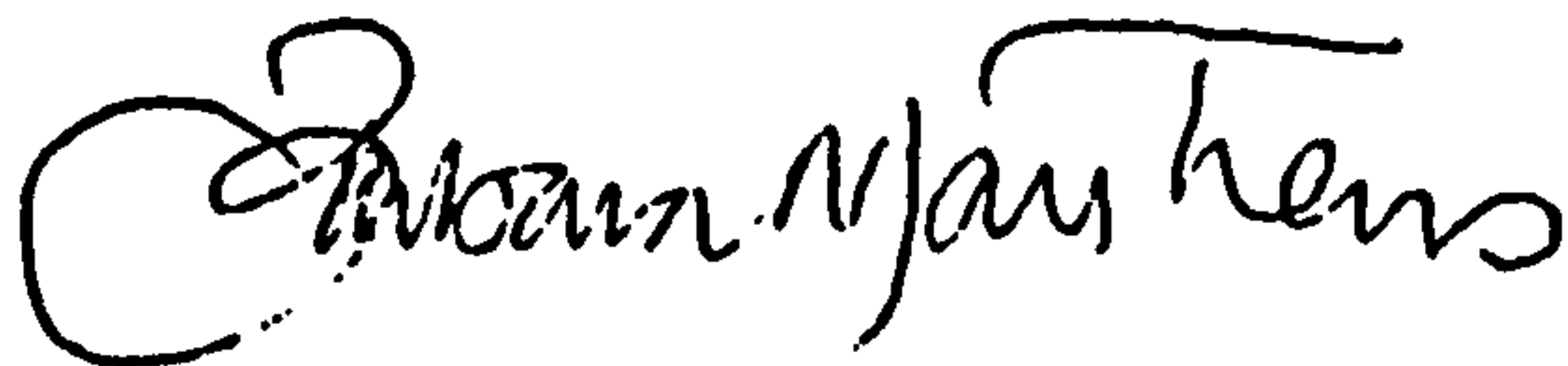
I hope that you did not feel that my first response was rude, but I admit I found it a little hard to fathom from your first exactly what you wanted and how we fitted into the scheme of things!

Like the Young Vic, we have no workshops and so everything is put out. Nor, incidentally, do we have any permanent technical staff but obviously they come under a different budget heading.

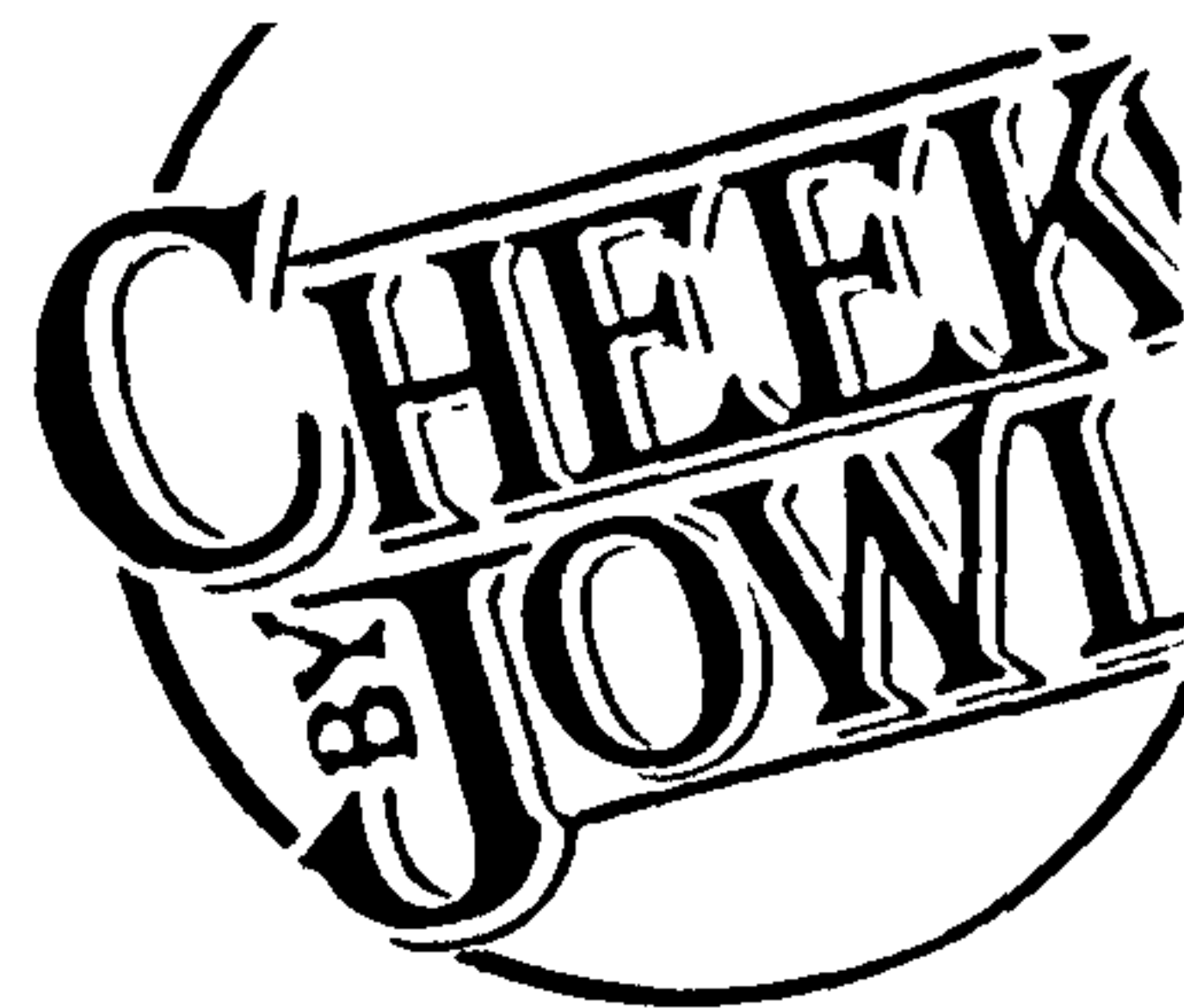
For *As You Like It*, the budget for the costumes and set was £20,000. In addition, there was approximately £100 per touring week budgeted for replacement and maintenance.

I hope this is what you need.

Yours sincerely,



Barbara Matthews  
Administrator



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COPY OF BUDGET FOR *THE WINTER'S TALE* AT THE YOUNG VIC  
1991/1992

PRODUCTION BUDGET 1991/92 THE WINTER'S TALE I  
 REHEARSALS FROM 29.7 PERF. 2.9 - 19.10.91

BUDGET ACTUAL

TICKET PRICES A) 13.00	11.06	13.00:34%	10.00:7%	9.00: 27%
B) 9.00	7.66		6.50:27%	5.00: 21%
C) 6.50	5.33			
13 ACTORS + 2 CHILDREN	14	14		
NO. ON SUBSISTENCE	2	2		
CONTRACT WEEKS	12	12		
CAPACITY	500	500	TOTAL AUDIENCE CAPACITY	
PERF. INCL. 12 MATINEES	50	49	21,500	
% ATTENDANCE	0.45	0.53 (FAID)	.61 (INCL. COMPS)	
NET BOX OFFICE RATIO% a)	0.30	13,065	14,929	
b)	0.45			
c)	0.25			

ACTORS BASIC 210 P/W	35280	37366 INCL. O/T & HOL. PAY
ACTORS OVERTIME	2000	
TECH/SM OVERTIME	3500	5273
HOLIDAY PAY	2940	
SAVING RE ACTORS DUPLICAT	-1680	
NI 10.40%	4547	4435
SUBSISTENCE 45.00	1080	1080
FARES	150	150

SUB-TOTAL	47817	48304
FEES - DIRECTOR	0	
ASS. DIRECTOR	2000	2594
- DESIGNER	2000	2000
MD/MUSICIAN	4200	4856
- LIGHTING	1000	1000
- OTHER	500	490
ENTERTAINMENT & PROMOTION	450	455
PRODUCTION BUDGET	26000	22345
DESIGN EXPENSE/ASSISTANT	1000	1000
TRAVEL EXPENSE	600	
USHER (INC NI) PERF-B5.32	4266	4301
TICKETS AT 2.4p EACH	600	617
TICKET AGENCY FEES	1500	958
PUBLICITY	11000	14398
PROGRAMME EXPENSES	2200	3420
SCRIPTS/REH ROOM/CASTING	1500	1466
GUYS & DOLLS POSTPONED	3500	0

TOTAL EXPENSES	110133	108204
NET B/OFFICE INCOME	91097	101669
PROGRAMME SALES	3750	5545

SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)	-15286	-990
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PROD7.BUD R125C7:R176 C12

31.3.92

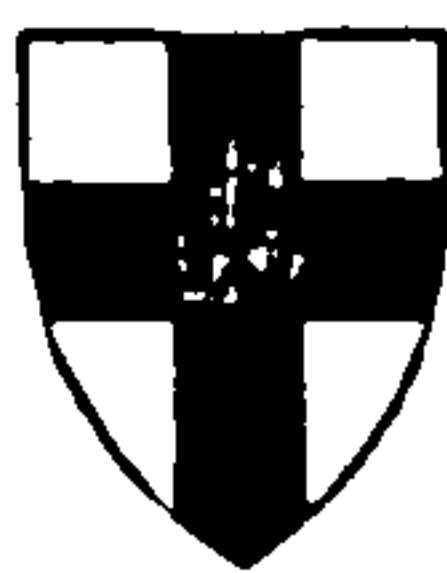


## APPENDIX 5

# THE HONOURABLE SOCIETY OF THE MIDDLE TEMPLE

Mrs Janet Edgell, BSc(Econ) DipLib ALA MIInfSci  
~~Miss E. McNally, BA, DLS, FCLA~~

Librarian & Keeper of the Records



The Library

Middle Temple, London EC4Y 9BT

Telephone 01-353 4303  
0171

INQ/ASA/KJ

Ms Joy Leslie Gibson  
36 Rosary Gardens  
South Kensington  
London, SW7 4NT

27 March 1995

Dear Ms Gibson,

I regret that an earlier reply to your enquiry of 6 March has not been possible.

304

The Middle Temple Hall is 100 feet long (including the entrance corridor behind the screen and under the minstrels' gallery at the east end) and 40 feet wide. The side walls are 29 feet high, but due to the double hammer beam roof it is actually 59 feet from floor to apex. The screen is 23 feet tall.

We do not have photographs 'per se' available for purchase, but an excellent photograph of the screen in all its pre-war glory illustrates J.B. Williamson's 'Middle Temple Bench Book' (2nd edition, 1937). Copies of this work (which is a mine of historical and biographical detail) are still available in the library, price £5. Should you be interested in acquiring a copy please telephone the Reader Services Librarian (Mr Adams).

Yours sincerely,

*Janet Edgell.*

Mrs J E Edgell  
Librarian and Keeper of the Records



15 March 1995

Joy Leslie Gibson  
36 Rosary Gardens  
London SW7 4NT

Dear Joy Leslie Gibson,

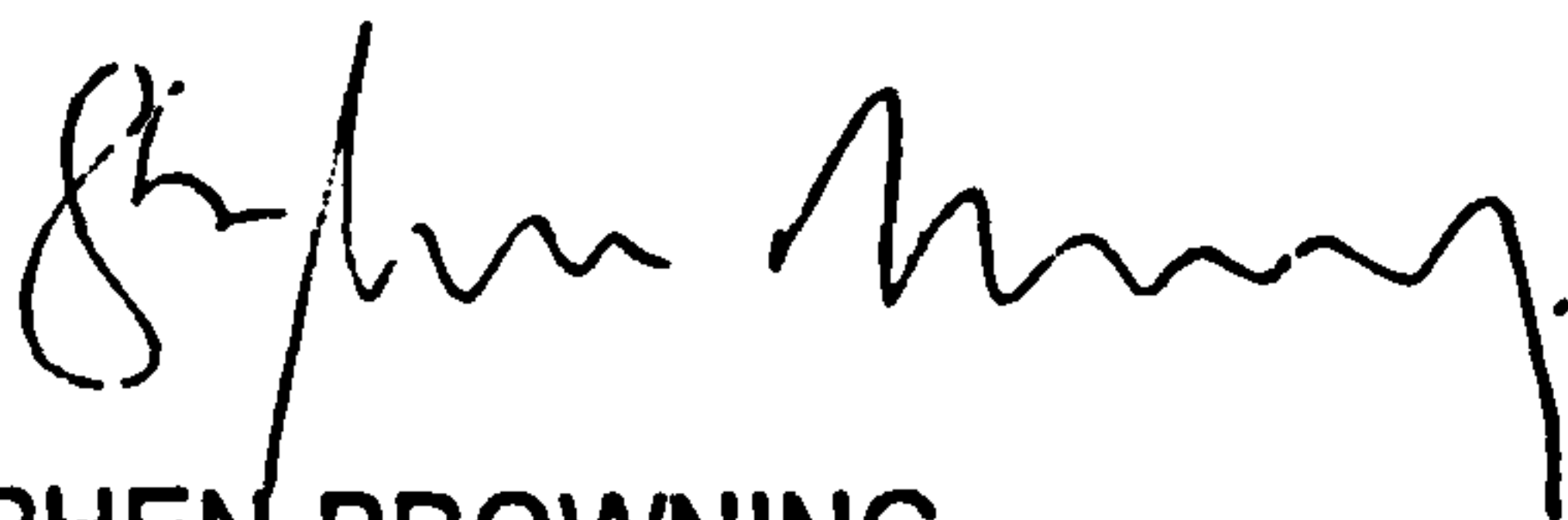
Thank you for your recent letter regarding your PhD thesis. The measurements you require are as follows:

The Pit:	9m x 7m	using 3 sides of seats	30 x 23 ft
	7m x 7m	using 4 sides of seats	23 x 23 ft
The Other Place:	9.4m x 9m		32 x 30 ft
The Swan:	13m	from back wall to front of stage	43 ft
	7m	width across the back	23 ft
	8m	thrust stage to front (included in 13m)	27 ft
	5.8m	width of thrust	19 1/2 ft

I do hope the above information is helpful.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,



STEPHEN BROWNING  
Head of Marketing Press and Publicity

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				Trevor Nunn	

Rosebery Avenue, London, EC1R 4TN

Sadler's Wells Theatre

**SADLER'S WELLS**  
Lilian Baylis Theatre

Administration

Fax

Box Office

Ms J L Gibson  
36 Rosary Gardens  
London  
SW7 4NT

Dear Ms Gibson

Thank you for your card which we received today. I am sorry if you did not receive the information that you required and have pleasure in supplying you with the dimensions of the Lilian Baylis Theatre.

Dimensions:

With seats away, 14.9m deep x 15.3m wide (account for permanent stairs on stage left of auditorium). Performance area with 181 seats, 7.5m deep x 15m wide.  
Performance area with 181 seats and wings, 7.5m deep x 10m wide. Height to radiators under lighting bridges 5.9m.

I hope that this is of assistance.

Yours sincerely



pp Kate Webber  
Assistant Administrator

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Young Vic

36, ROSARY GARDENS, LONDON, SW 7 4 NT.

Dear David,

I forgot to photostat the stuff I wanted from the WINTER'S TALE and TIMON files. Would you be kind and do it for me and let me know when I can pick it up?

- 1) Picture of the TIMON set (contact sheet only)
- 2) Production Notes
- 3) Budget for WINTER'S TALE
- 4) Size of acting space when the theatre is a) in the round and b) when it is in courtyard formation as it was for TIMON.

a)  $8\frac{1}{2}$  m deep x 8 m wide

With many thanks and best wishes

b) 10 m deep x 7 m wide

dy

## APPENDIX 6



~~BARRY FOSTER~~

4 Aug. 95.

Dear Mr. Gibson -

I'm so sorry to be so late in replying to your letter. After a long tour of <sup>an</sup> Inspector Call in Australia & Austria (!) almost all my time is taken up clearing my desk of official paperwork - mainly, of course, tax & general financial horrors.

Added to which I won't be much help, I think. Strangely, although the Young Vic is a small space, it is (or was when we did Timon) a very 'dead' acoustical space - we had to project quite as much as in a pros arch theatre. But in the 'Bush' for example, the strength of performance can come down to the level of a film close-up. I say 'can' because the media aren't piped-in there.

Depending on the structural situation  
a close-up on film can be performed  
at maximum intensity. Large or small,  
the truth, & only the truth, will convince.

As for your second question:-  
But you were there - that's what theatre  
is about. We are constantly aware of the  
audience whatever the medium, though of  
course the 2 or 5 or 6 watching a film take  
or being closest to one in a small cinema  
theatre are more in focus than a full  
house in the Albert Hall. Even there, a  
few hundred will be very close & must be  
convinced as much as those in the galleries.  
But that awareness & reaction to the new  
audience, seeing the play for the first  
time each night, is what makes the long  
run a possibility for the actor. There!

Yours sincerely  
Gordon Foster



Tues 30th May

Dear Tony,

Please forgive the delay, I've been a little busy lately and therefore my answers may seem a little blunt but I hope they are of some help.

1 As I worked on the play I found that there had to be a reason why Rosalind kept her disguise with Orlando. At first it's a momentary joke but then, somehow the joke continues for the best part of 2 hrs. WHY? I found it would help Rosalind's motivation to teach her lover if he failed at a fairly easy ~~test~~ test of affection very early on. Something as easy as recognising her.

Also his failure to recognise her is very wounding to Rosalind which helps to fuel her anger in the following scenes. Which, in turn, helps me as an actor make sense of them.

2. The changes are fairly technical really mainly out of consideration for the distance of the audience, visibility, clarity of diction, volume, etc.

3 DeLan is of the school of Directors that allows the audience to believe in the play. He doesn't insult their intelligence by trying to make them believe. In this way he helps the actors use one of their most powerful tools..... the audience's imagination.

Elaboration would require 3 to 400 pages!!!

Hope these short ones are useful yours.

Al ..... Lester

*David Suchet*

Timon

AGENT : ICM, 76 Oxford Street, London, W1N 0AX

March 7, 1995

Dear Joy

Thank you for your letter and I hope I can answer your questions to your satisfaction.

1. When going onto a 'thrust' stage one always has to be aware of what is happening around you. It is not necessary to worry too much about sight-lines but you must make sure that you don't stay in one position for too long because at any one time someone is always going to see your back.
2. The production was shaped by the design rather than the stage. The design therefore controlling or demanding movement within its own area, even though there were occasions when the drama moved slightly outside of this area.
3. The circling movement to which you refer was indeed used on many occasions though once again this came about because of the set rather than just working on a thrust.
4. I suppose the most interesting memory is that it was the first time I had worked on 'three' sides. During my career I have of course acted in small theatres, but the most extraordinary thing was that I was aware that whilst I was on stage at no point could I hide be private. No matter which way I turned someone could always see something of my face.

I hope these comments are helpful.

Yours sincerely

A large, stylized handwritten signature of David Suchet, written in dark ink. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent 'D' and 'S'.



## APPENDIX 7

Rgd Office: Gloucester Mansions, West Street  
Cambridge Circus, London WC2H 8HD  
Tel: (071) 240 5435 Fax: (071) 240 1945  
Rgd 1380522 VAT No 523 1383 75



4 October 1995

Joy Leslie Gibson  
36 Rosary Gardens  
LONDON  
SW7 4NT

Dear Joy Leslie Gibson

I have been holding on to your letters requesting a meeting with Trevor Nunn to discuss his production of "Timon of Athens" in the hopes that it would be possible to arrange something.

Sadly, very late in the day we were able to put together a film to be made this autumn and suddenly Mr Nunn's schedule has become impossibly tight. I am afraid that it would not be possible to arrange anything before the end of the year.

I am not sure whose 'production notes' you have and cannot say to whom that quote should be attributed. I have enclosed a copy of the programme notes Mr Nunn wrote which I believe to be all that he wrote on the subject. There also were a number of newspaper interviews with Mr Nunn at the time, which I am sure the Young Vic would be able to provide.

I am sorry it has not been possible to arrange a meeting - and send best wishes for your thesis.

Yours sincerely

MaryLee MacNulty

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Cambridge Circus, London WC2H 8HD  
Tel: (071) 240 5435 Fax: (071) 240 1945  
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NOTES PROVIDED BY TREVOR NUNN ON *Timon of Athens*

Shakespeare makes little or no attempt in his draft to create a classical or ancient world; his Athens exists independent of any political or religious detail; it is a mercantile city, giving itself up to cynicism and inhumanity, masquerading as unsentimentality, that comes from the belief that the only valuation that matters in this life is money and the market. Anachronisms abound; the play is obviously targeted at the writer's contemporaries and seems to be fuelled by the evidence of his own eyes and ears about the changing and self-justifying world he was forced to live in.

In this context, Shakespeare probes the motives for and responses to philanthropy and charts the progress of a generous man on a catastrophic declension through disillusion to a misanthropy so virulent that even the most hardened and ruthless cynic might blench at it.

Ill-digested as it is, there is something both angry and spontaneous in the quality of the writing, which is reminiscent of the docu-drama, which aims to answer, or influence, immediate issues on the public conscience.

During a meeting to discuss the financial problems of The Young Vic, David Thacker asked me if I would do a Shakespearean production for him. When I thought of the tradition of relevant classics at The Young Vic, and the budgetary constraints too, it seemed to me that a twentieth-century presentation or contemporary presentation of *Timon* was not only right in the circumstances, but answered in some way the demand that the play be an unsettling piece of direct address - raw and provocative. It is not a propagandist diatribe, and no attempt has been made to turn it into a political manifesto. But since we live at a time when so much philanthropy is asked of us (through organised charity or just through the experience of every street corner) and yet when economic theory argues that the state should be unsentimental about those in need, it would not serve the play to suggest it was only about the conditions of a bygone age.

There is an understandable resistance to the transposing of Shakespeare's stories to different times in history, especially our own, because of the suspicion that we are not getting "Shakespeare as Shakespeare intended". But Shakespeare did not intend *Timon* to be an oddity or a rarity; he started to write a caustic account of the way our priorities change when we get near money, and ironically this rarity is extraordinarily relevant to how we live now.

Trevor Nunn 1991



## TIMON OF ATHENS

"Athens" must be a fictional metropolis, neither palpably the City of London or New York or Tokyo - but in some sense a cosmopolitan mixture of all three.

The story of Timon takes place now, or possibly next year, in this world which seems to have been constructed as a place to house, make, discuss and transfer money.

There are glimpses of a style of life which the money making supports, but the connection back to the city, the bank, is never broken, until Timon passes into the wilderness of junk and detritus that lies abandoned in the hinterland beyond.

### Act 1, Scene 1

Outside Timon's headquarters. Ideally hundreds of glass buildings would be reflected in the glass panels of Timon's glass empire. There is a roped off area (chromium posts, red ropes) where Timon gives his morning press conference. There are journalists, cameras (TV and otherwise) and the participants in Timon's charity work, arts patronage and so on. When Timon appears, it is to a lectern equipped with microphones.

Apemantus is a disturbing presence, an obviously foul smelling street person, unwashed and dangerous in manner.

### Act 1, Scene 2

Timon has put on a sumptuous buffet - with a long white clad table groaning with tureens, warming pans, platters and bowls of everything imaginable. A silver meat carving trolley circulates (two would be better) and champagne is refilled constantly.

The floor show is more sophisticated than a striptease, but is based on the same principle, as the women divest 18th century ball-gowns to reveal contemporary sleaze beneath - and eventually dance with the wealthy men.

### Act 2, Scene 1

An airport check in. Information on flights, in foreign languages, chimes to announce and conclude messages. A group is clustered around a baggage trolley laden with many matching suitcases, pushed by a porter. The senator has his staff with him to see him off - checking briefcase contents, using the radio-phone for updates - giving him ticket and passport. Caphis returns from buying him financial magazines and is dispatched back into town. The senator leaves on final call.

cont'd ...



Act 2, Scene 2

Timon's estate. Timon and his close friends are shooting and betting and drinking. The shooting party moves off, and the bystanders are revealed to be servants of creditors. The shooting party returns - Timon has his conversation with the steward while counting scores and marking cards. It darkens and Timon is suddenly cold.

Apemantus is now following Timon, still sleeping rough, but accepted as part of Timon's retinue. He has with him another tramp, who has gone on the road having been moved out of a mental institution - the text calls him The Fool.

Act 3, Scene 1

An office near to the noise of hundreds of telephones and shouted deals. Screens flick through share prices world wide. Talk back 'phones on the desk, secretaries, male and female, move in and out. Eventually Lucullus removes secretaries and switches off talk back when he needs to be specially private with Flaminus.

Completed.  
R. 20 07  
S. 20 07

Act 3, Scene 2

The paddock at a race meeting. Lucius is brown trilby hatted just like "the strangers" - who are all owners talking final instructions to their jockeys - watching ritual arm signals about betting - using assistants to bet more.

At a certain point the jockey's leave and at a later point a blurred loudspeaker keeps up a tense incantatory but inaudible commentary. Binoculars are used, betting slips are torn up, and clearly fortunes of money have changed hands during the scene to induce momentary pleasure.

Act 3, Scene 3

The changing room/locker space at a squash court. Sempronious is coming back from a game he has obviously lost, drenched in sweat, smothered in towels. He slumps - drinks barley water, and eventually takes off shoes and socks and shirt and shorts before going off to the shower.

Act 3, Scene 4

Outside Timon's headquarters. The lectern is being covered and removed. No press conference today.

When Timon does appear, he is in pyjamas and dressing gown still as the flashbulbs explode.

cont'd ...



Act 3, Scene 5

A senate hearing. A long table equipped with microphones, occupied by a senatorial committee hearing appeals. Alcibiades is at his smaller table - accompanied by a lawyer. A stenographer sits close by. The hearing is being televised - extra bright lights burn into the protagonists. The debacle at the climax of the scene is a muddle of microphone noise and live shouts. Alcibiades becomes aware he is on camera.

*Mick*

Act 3, Scene 6

The holy of holies, the private dining room at Timon's headquarters. A polished table, six chairs, overhead lights. The confrontation is widespread and personal and humiliating - not in any sense epic.

Act 4, Scene 2

elides on to the end of these previous scene and therefore is the clearing up of all that has occurred.

Act 4, Scene 1

Empty space, with the city reflected in the glass - Timon eventually turns and passes through the glass wall, revealing for the first time the mountain of junk and rusty rotting discarded civilization piled up behind. He climbs it unsteadily and disappears.

INTERVAL

Act 4, Scene 3

The mountain of junk has spread forward like lava so that it covers much of the space. Bushes and trees grow up through wrecked and discarded cars, cans and drums sit in the mud from which grass is untidily growing.

## APPENDIX 8



# A Midsummer Night's Dream

Georgian Film Actors' Studio, Tbilisi

Directed by Mikhail Tumanishvili

Sponsored by the LYCRA® Division of DuPont



## Synopsis

Music! An empty stage.

Suddenly Puck emerges from the shadows and speaks Shakespeare's words: life is a dream and when we want to escape from reality, nothing is better than imagination.

We are sinking into a dream. In Athens, Theseus is happy with his Hippolyte: 'Our nuptial hour draws on apace'.

Enter Egeus on an official visit because his daughter, Hermia refuses to wed Demetrius. Theseus passes a sharp sentence, according to Athenian law. Hermia has: 'Either to die the death or to objure for ever the society of men'.

The thread is breaking between Hermia and Lysander.

Enter actors; they offer Theseus a comedy for nuptial ceremony: 'The most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe'.

Rehearsal is fixed for tomorrow night in the palace wood.

Hermia is in despair. Lysander finds the way out: 'I have a widow aunt...From Athens is her house remov'd, seven leagues...There gentle Hermia may I marry thee'.

Using a telephone, Helena tells Demetrius that lovers run away. 'Cupid is blind' and Helena is unhappy.

Theseus enjoys the happiness of his love.

Puck lulls him to sleep. The Dream begins.

Magic night. Fairies. Puck.

Enter Oberon and Titania.

The King and Queen of the fairies have domestic troubles. A diplomatic parting.

Oberon is through with revenges: 'My gentle Puck, fetch me that flower... The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid will make or man or woman madly dote upon the next live creature that it sees'.

A tragic scene: Helena in love with Demetrius who loves someone else. Oberon decides to help her.

Puck and Oberon prepare the magic potion. Titania is the victim.

Lysander and Hermia have lost their way in the labyrinth of wood.

A rehearsal. It is also a madness.

An actor turning into an ass. Titania madly in love with him. Love is beyond logic. Puck mixes everything. The lovers have lost each other. Real chaos.

Sad Oberon frees Titania from a spell and they love each other.

Oberon speaks words from *The Tempest*: 'We are such stuff, as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep', and they disappear into a dream.

A performance! Here is the point of culmination. We created it as a parody of our theatre, and we can all find ourselves in that world.

Life is a dream and it is difficult to understand which is more real, reality or dream. Farewell Puck!

## Director's notes

### Mikhail Tumanishvili on himself

I was born in 1921 in Tbilisi, Caucasus, not far from the place where over the hills, above the clouds (as legend has it), Prometheus was chained. I was fond of theatre from my childhood. Then, in 1941, there was a big war: wounds, captivity, German concentration camps, escape, cavalry corps. After the war I learnt to direct performances and spent 25 years with the famous Rustaveli Theatre as a director. My productions during that period include Fletcher's *Spanish Priest*, Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Julius Caesar*, Nakhutsrishvili's *Chinchraka*, Anouilh's *Antigone* and many, many others. Victories and defeats alternated. Always in search of something, in 1971 I left the Rustaveli Theatre Company. How it happened, I tried to tell in my book *Director leaves the Theatre*.

### On his work

When a crisis comes in creative work, and it inevitably does, then a director tries to start a studio. I was lucky. I gathered my students (I've taught directors and actors for more than 45 years) and together we founded a very small theatre. The Georgian Film Studio helped us and we became the Film Actors' Studio.

Our stage has no wings and no curtain, as it was in the Globe Theatre, and we perform on these bare boards as on a scaffold. We strive to burn and blaze in burning down. Sometimes instead of light we get soot.

### On *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

I've loved this Shakespearean comedy all my life. It speaks about the nature of love, love of the theatre, of ourselves. We rehearsed the play while Tbilisi was shattered by shootings in the street. Many people were killed, buildings destroyed. The theatre was freezing cold. The first night was on Christmas Day 1992. People still came, our audience always come to us. And we, together in our spiritual haven, tried to survive. We were together. Blessed be the Theatre!



*A Midsummer Night's Dream*



# Romeo and Juliet

The Itim Theatre Ensemble in association with

The Cameri Theatre of Tel Aviv

Directed by Rina Yerushalmi

## Synopsis

A theatre, a small stage, a horse and a legend of love. The Chorus inspired by these begins the play.

The young Capulets and Montagues in a game of foolery which leads to a fight. The prince stops it, and warns them that the punishment is death if the fight is resumed.

Signora Montague is searching for Romeo but he wishes to be left alone with his pain of unrequited love. Benvolio insists on helping him to forget her. Pietro arrives with invitations to the Capulet's ball, one of which is for Rosaline, Romeo's love.

Mercutio and the young Montagues are on their way to sneak into the ball. Mercutio puts on a woman's wig and offers himself as Romeo's date. Romeo is nervous about the ball: he has had a dream which leaves him troubled by premonitions of his death, but Mercutio lightens his spirits by acting out Queen Mab's dream.

The Chorus is excited by the coming of the girls. Everyone prepares for the ball. The Nurse chatters happily because Juliet is to be married soon. The ball takes place with its magic game of love. Tybalt threatens to kill Romeo. The Chorus acts out 'the kiss' and on a horse, Romeo and Juliet finally meet.

The Chorus, with his two birds of love and Romeo, are in the Capulet's garden. One Juliet on the horse, another on the stage. Romeo mounts the horse for the balcony scene. Another Romeo runs to beg Friar Laurence to marry them and he, led by the hope of peace between the families, agrees.

The Nurse and Pietro are looking for Romeo. Mercutio takes delight in taunting her and keeping him out of her reach.

Meanwhile, Juliet on the horse and the musicians by her, are waiting. As the Nurse tells Juliet of the arrangements for her wedding, another is on stage already meeting Friar Laurence.

The Chorus warns that there will be violent ends to violent delights. Everyone is waiting for the duel between Romeo and Tybalt and although Romeo refuses to fight, Mercutio mocks Tybalt and challenges him. The ritual of the duel begins and the ultimate game of death takes place.

From this point on, numbers of Romeos and Juliets merge into each others paths until all enter the Capulet's tomb. The Chorus is now Romeo. He embraces the dead Juliet for the last time and drinks the poison. As one Juliet wakes up and kills herself, another is taking the potion which will put her to sleep.

The Nurse is sobbing, the parents are silent and all gather around the open graves. Hands touch hands and Friar Laurence talks of the earth which embraces all living things; she is (the earth) their womb and their tomb. Peace is made.

## The Pit

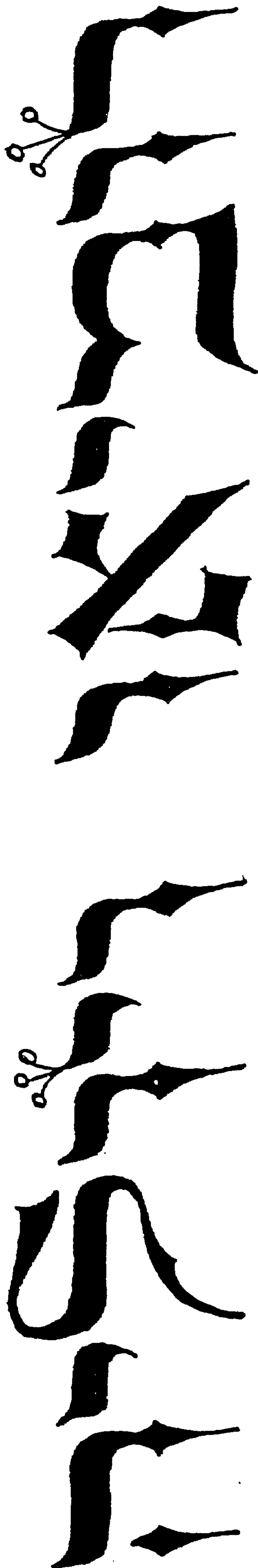
Tuesday 8 - Saturday 12 November 8.00pm

Matinees: Thursday & Friday 2.00pm

(Please note there will be no Friday evening performance)

Rina Yerushalmi in conversation with Adrian Noble  
Friday 11 November, after the matinee  
performance in The Pit.

Free to ticket holders for the matinee performance.



## APPENDIX 9



---

Ms. Joy Leslie Gibson  
36 Rosary Gardens  
London SW7 4NT

Matt Trendall  
CMR Travel and Leisure  
NOP Research Group  
Tower House  
Southampton Street  
London WC2E 7HN

Dear Ms. Gibson,

I am replying to you on behalf of Mic Rogers, who is my boss. Having chatted to him about your letter, this is our response to your questions (copy of your original letter is enclosed):

1. It is possible to get fairly technical about the relative accuracy of various sample sizes, and certainly this is an important aspect of market research. To be honest, I'm not especially statistical, however I would say that to have a sample large enough to make even vaguely firm conclusions, which might be of real value in developing your thesis, you would be looking at obtaining several hundred respondents. This is the easy question, really. I feel the real difficulty is in deciding how to obtain the research.

The great problem with doing research in the area of the dramatic arts is in finding the right occasion to get completed questionnaires. Our experience is that people are in too much of a hurry to find their seat before they go in, and unwilling to analyse their feelings when they come out at the end of the performance. It is also unrealistic to attempt to undertake research some time after the event, because of the difficulties of finding the sample, be that either postal or face-to-face. One has, therefore, to find a way of presenting people with your questions during the evening of the performance in a way which will get completed questionnaires. Were you to undertake this project yourself, I think you have two best options: (a) attempting face-to-face interviews during the interval of various performances; (b) putting short, self-completion questionnaires on seats, preferably ones they can fill in during the interval or after the show, rather than take them home.

Inevitably, both options have pros and cons. You can design a more ambitious questionnaire for face-to-face, because the personal contact will always keep people interested, but you can obviously only do one at once! So you need to spend a lot of 'person hours' simply collecting the data.

A self-completion questionnaire has to be short and snappy, and the data will probably have more mistakes. Consequently, you lose out on depth of ideas, and probably should avoid open-ended questions. The big plus, though, is that with the right presentation, and a bit of plugging from the theatres you choose to target, you don't have to find the interviewers, or do them yourself! I personally feel this is your best bet, dependent on the response of the theatres, production companies, and so on.

So, to answer your questions:

2. In general, your completion rate would be around 5-10% for self-completions. Aim for something you can fit on a single sheet, as this will improve your rate considerably.

---

3. This is obviously dependent on whether you can get names and addresses of people who actually go to Shakespeare productions. If not, then the numbers of questionnaires you would have to send out would be so huge as to make the cost prohibitive. If you can find a source, however, then the completion rates are fairly similar to Q2, though you may have more leeway on the length of the questionnaire.

4. As I indicated in question 1, whatever method you use, you would need several hundred completed interviews. Assuming a 3-5 minute interview length, my guess is you would do well to get 5-6 completed interviews for one evening's interviewing during the interval and after the show. Consequently, you either need to interview during 80-100 shows yourself, or get helpers! This is why self-completion is useful, for your own sanity!

5. I certainly think you could do it yourself, given a decent word processing package. We can certainly give you some helpful hints, but we don't usually design questionnaires unless we do the job, and that would probably cost you c.£5000 for a sample size of 500. The key for you would be to look to get 'closed' answers i.e. to frame questions which force people to make a choice about their opinions. eg 'Would you agree strongly, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or disagree strongly with the following statements...?' This would hopefully give you actual figures to back up your ideas.

6. Absolutely! (Though whether it's the answer you want...!) It's essentially a comparative survey, so frame the questions to get people to compare their feelings towards large and small space productions, and to code as closed replies (see Q5).

I hope this gives you at least some of the information you need for developing your thesis. My direct line 0171-612-0129, and by all means contact me if you need to pick my brains. I think the thesis sounds fascinating, and I wish you all the best.

Kind regards,

*Matt Trendall*

Matt Trendall



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## *As You Like It, by Cheek By Jowl*

*Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord, Paris. January, 1995.*

Joy Leslie Gibson

The *Cheek By Jowl* Production I saw at the *Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord*, in Paris, was part of a two-year tour which included New York, Moscow, St Petersburg, Barcelona, Düsseldorf, Pilsen, Craiova, Bucharest, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem as well as the UK and the *Albery Theatre*, London. The production had previously been performed in 1991/2 in the UK and on a world tour, with some of the same cast.

Originally a proscenium arch theatre (the arch remains), the *Théâtre des Bouffes du Nord* can now be counted as an arena theatre, as the wooden stage is built out into the audience beyond the arch. The audience sits on padded benches enclosing the stage. There are two doors downstage right and left and two entrances upstage right and left. For the *Cheek By Jowl* production of *As You Like It*, a white cloth was stretched across the back and sides of the stage making this a white box production. There were two spots at the back and other spots in a row slung across the arch while there were also lights coming from the balconies. These lights were used to underline the moods of the scene but were never obtrusive. For the forest wide bands of green ribbon were let down from the flies, and a leaf pattern was projected onto the backcloth.

The cast was all male and entered together wearing black trousers and white shirts. Jacques started 'All the world's a stage'. At '...and the men', the actors crossed the stage towards the left, and at '...and the women', Adrian Lester and Simon Coates, who were playing Rosalind and Celia, crossed over to the right. When the play proper started, the actors came forth to play their parts with the others watching, but the stage cleared as each scene progressed and the actors exited in character. The costumes were modern; the Duke's court were all immaculate in tails and white tie, the Duke himself with sleeked back hair and a brandy glass and cigarette in his hands. Adam was in an old tail coat indicating his butler's status while Orlando was in shabby trousers and shirt. The two girls were in long satin dresses: Celia's red, worn with pearls; Rosalind in blue with a bandeau around her head. She also carried around with her a battered case in which she kept her treasured books and possessions: she wore glasses to read. In the forest, Rosalind wore breeches and a loose shirt and jacket. She still kept a bandeau around her head. Celia was in a nondescript dress and cardigan. The rest of the foresters were in rough brownish breeches and homespun skirts. The whole design concept was modern without being aggressively so, very simple, and defined the characters without being in the least bit obtrusive.

Having men playing the four women's parts (Lester and Coates were joined by Wayne Carter as a very funny, bossy, self-assured Phoebe; while Richard Cant played a seductive and sweet Audrey) was entirely convincing. The

audience was not, of course, seeing a production that was Elizabethan: these were men, not adolescent boys. Nor did the men caricature women as a drag artiste does. They played human beings who happened to be women. Adrian Lester said to *The Independent* (4 January 1995),

Initially, I was trying to be a woman and the more I tried, the more the audience noticed the gap. It was the moment that I got into trousers and forgot trying to be female that the audience started to believe I was.

Declan Donellan, the director, told the men not to imitate women but to look for an inner femininity. Simon Coates (in the same feature) said that he started repressing traits that he thought too testosterone based and

The second I became anyway aggressive on stage, I thought, 'Oh my God, I'm being too masculine.' But Declan said, 'You've really got to go for the aggression...' I see Adrian as a woman all the time on stage.

Donellan explained that

Exposing the nuts and bolts of theatre actually makes you more involved in the play. Instead of being a clever essay on gender confusion the device [of using men] opened up the play's emotional heart.

What of the problems inherent in the play? The relationship between Rosalind and Celia was defined as being one of great love on the part of Celia. She caressed Rosalind as they lay on a rug on the stage with an intensity that was more than cousinly. And when Celia's father, the Duke, arrived on stage and Rosalind became a frightened, abject girl, Celia's looks of concern were, again, intense. There was no doubt that she loved, was perhaps in love, with Rosalind. This was carried out throughout the play, and her marriage to Oliver, therefore, became not a love match, but one of convenience, which, as a princess, she would have expected to make anyway. It was an interpretation entirely justified by the text, as Celia declares her love quite openly when she says

Mason Goff Review 1995



[...]We still have slept  
together,  
Rose at an instant, learn'd,  
play'd, eat together,  
And wherso'er we went, like  
Juno's swans,  
Still went coupled and  
inseparable (I,iii)

And, later in the same scene, 'No, hath not?  
Rosalind lacks then the love | Which teacheth thee that  
thou and I am one.'

During the wooing scenes, Celia displayed  
jealousy, and this gave an added edge to her upbraiding of  
Rosalind/Ganymede for being unwomanly.

The central problem of the  
play, whether Orlando recognises  
Ganymede as Rosalind, was  
cleverly handled. Adrian Lester,  
when he saw Orlando, showed by  
body language that he wanted to  
be recognised, standing and  
making 'Look, it's me' gestures.  
Scott Handy, as Orlando, gazed  
for a moment, then raised his hand  
in a negative gesture — 'I do not  
want to know it's you' was the  
unspoken subtext. As Adrian  
Lester writes, why does the  
momentary joke go on for the rest  
of the play. Lester found that it  
would help his motivation to think  
of this as a test that Orlando failed  
— not to recognize her. It is very  
wounding to Rosalind, and helps  
to fuel her anger (and Lester was a  
very angry Rosalind) and was a  
prime motive which helped him to  
make sense of the character.

Some of the doubling  
showed the company's acting  
strength. David Hobbs doubled the  
two Dukes — one smart and  
smarmy, the other be-spectacled  
and compassionate. Paul Kissaun  
doubled Charles and Corin. The  
characterization of Corin was a  
most unsatisfactory concept, as he  
was made dull and stupid (much of  
the scene was cut) instead of  
embodying simple wisdom.

In the small space of the  
*Bouffes du Nord*, where the  
audience encircled the stage and  
actors made entrances and exits  
through the audience, the small

space was well used and really drew the audience into  
the forest with the actors. Until Rosalind's Epilogue  
there was no playing to the audience, but the  
commitment of the actors reached out. The space lent  
itself to the intimacy of the playing, and the economy of  
the set, the way that scenes rapidly followed each other,  
the intelligent speaking of the lines made for an  
enlightening performance. There was no extravagance  
in the forest. For the Litany of Love, Orlando was lying  
on the floor with a sheet over him, and the others joined  
him in the 'bed': the same sheet was used over wooden  
blocks to make as altar for the wedding, just as it might  
have been in real life. There was a happy sense of  
improvisation throughout.

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# The Other Stratford

Joy Leslie Gibson

I do not know how many Stratfords there are in the world [There are 21. — Ed], but the one in Ontario, Canada, has similarities with *our* Stratford. It is much bigger, of course, one of those straggling transatlantic towns with wide roads and paths. Its oldest building is only 160 years old, but its river (the Avon, pronounced with a short 'a') runs through the town and, like ours, it has three theatres — the *Festival*, the *Avon* and the *Tom Patterson*.

The Festival started forty-two years ago and was the inspiration of Tom Patterson, a local citizen who thought that a town called Stratford ought to have its Shakespeare festival. He asked Sir Tyrone Guthrie to be its director, and the original theatre was in a tent. Sir Tyrone insisted that there be a permanent set, similar to that found in an Elizabethan theatre, and Tanya Moiseiwitsch designed one which is still there in the now substantially built theatre which is set in a large park. The stage thrusts out into the audience which curves round it in a configuration similar to an Ancient Greek arena. It holds 2,276 people. From my hotel in Romeo Street, I had to go through Birnam Wood (an arboretum, just started with, as yet, fledgling trees), and wander along the river and over a field. People bring picnics and eat alongside the river, and it is a cross between Chichester and Glyndebourne.

The *Avon Theatre* is in the middle of the town, about half-an-hour's walk from the main theatre. It was originally a vaudeville theatre, then a cinema and now the *Festival's* proscenium-arch theatre. It holds just over 800 people, is painted a dark navy blue and has glittering chandeliers, and very comfortable seats.

The *Tom Patterson Theatre* holds 490 people and reverts to a badminton hall during the winter. It has a long apron stage and seats on three sides. Sitting in it is rather like being in a large up-turned ship as the beams curve and swoop. I saw a production in each of the theatres.

The most disconcerting thing for an insular English visitor is the number of accents on stage. The company, though mainly Canadian, comes from many ethnic groups. Besides British and French Canadians there are people of African or Caribbean descent, Chinese, Middle-Europeans as well as the odd Brit or two who prefer to live in Canada — David William, Brian Bedford and Nicholas Pennell (Michael Mont in *The Forsyte Saga*), who are the elder statesmen of the company. Each actor has his own particular accent, derived from his background. Unfortunately, the cadence of Canadian English, mixed with subtle difference of accent, does not always make for good verse-speaking and constantly I found myself murmuring 'iambic pentameter — mark the ends of the lines, please.' The Director of the *Festival*, Richard Monette, is making a point of 'intensely discovering the text in rehearsal and putting an emphasis

on the words', but much work is needed to deliver the text in its beauty. The Company is an ad hoc one, assembled every year, but people come back again and again, and the Young Company, which does a production each year in the *Tom Patterson Theatre*, is a recruiting ground for future members.

The first play I saw was *Othello* at the *Avon Theatre* with Brian Bedford as the director, who chose to set it in the USA of the 1940's, as he discovered that that was when the first black general had been appointed. It added nothing to the play, though the story was well told and the production kept simple. The black Hollywood actor, Ron O'Neal, had a great deal of charm, but none of the primitive nobility that *Othello* really needs. Lucy Peacock, who simply could not speak the verse at all, was Desdemona, and Scott Wentworth, as Iago, had a nice line in benign evil.

*Hamlet* in the *Tom Patterson Theatre* was full of textual changes and transpositions. All the political and Fortinbras scenes were cut. 'To be or not to be' was transposed to the scene between Polonius and Hamlet, after 'except my life'. The plotting between Claudius and Laertes was acted by Ophelia's graveside. It was a low-key production, presenting *Hamlet* as a domestic rather than a great political play. The acting was similarly low-key and the whole production lacked dignity and grandeur. Stephen Ouimette, as Hamlet, had not enough glamour for the part and, again, the verse-speaking left a lot to be desired.

This was also true of *Twelfth Night*, which was in the *Festival Theatre*. Lucy Peacock was Viola and again demonstrated her inability to speak verse in what was an adventurous and imaginative production. The comic scenes came off the best, but Malvolio (David William) was far more aristocratic than Olivia, who was unconvincing as the great lady. The outstanding performance was Brian Bedford's Feste, an old, sad man near death.

Summing up, I would say that the quality of the productions was very high. Scenery, props, costumes and wigs were first class — the theatre has its own work-rooms and makes for all the outstanding productions in Toronto as well, but the acting was at times mediocre. The two leading actors that I saw, Stephen Ouimette and Colm Feore (in *Cyrano de Bergerac*), were competent enough, and I saw no outstanding women. Perhaps it is unfair to make a judgement after seeing only four plays but I must conclude that Canadian actors are not always successful in verse-speaking or able to assume an aristocratic demeanour when required. Acting Shakespeare needs more than clear story-telling, good costumes and scenery; it needs an awareness of the grandeur of the plays and of their complexity. But then, the Canadians cannot be held to account for what is possibly bias on my part... 'So many lands, so many fashions'.

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